

Ark Volume 11

Act 1: Unfinished Quest

What is this? Magaro is a boss monster?"

Ark was unable to process the absurd sight in front of him. What type of 4D space was in that person's body? How did the body of an old man suddenly become a 10 metre tall monster? Had the alchemist never heard of the law of conservation of mass? Ark was a modern man with common sense so he questioned it but Magaro was already talking.

"Huhuhu, I absolutely can't lose. I can't lose to anyone! All of this is mine. Only I can have it! I will kill everyone who tries to take it away from me!"

.....He couldn't even try a conversation in this atmosphere. No, he had seen many boss monsters but this was the first time he dreaded looking at one.

It was like an experiment failed and he just stitched random monster parts to his body. Each eyeball rotated in a different direction. 10 different arms with colouring blisters covering it.....It was the first time he had seen such a scary monster. Ark wasn't the only person to think so.

"Huk, w-what the hell?"

The cry emerged from around the corner when Magaro transformed. He turned his head and saw that the pig was sitting down on ground. Buksil had used 'historical mission' as an excuse to Lariette and followed Ark. He was about to use his 'secret weapon' when he saw Magaro and froze. Then Magaro's eyes rolled around and focused on Buksil. Ark's body instinctively moved.

"S-such.....such a stupid bastard.....!"

Ark used 'Sprint' and collided with Buksil.

Geul-!

Buksil was thrown into the air. At the same time, Magaro's arms moved in strange angles and attacked. Despite using his sword to block, Ark was pushed back a few metres. Sweat poured down his body at the fearsome monster's fierce attack.

"Ah, Ark-nim? You rescued me....?"

"You stupid fool, you can't die so selfishly!"

“Ark-nim!”

Buksil looked at Ark with tearful eyes. He had secretly followed Ark in order to use his ‘secret weapon’ and obtain Magaro’s legacy. That is, to strike him in the back..... But he felt strange once Ark used his body to prevent him from dying.

‘Ah, although Ark-nim is wicked, he truly regarded me as his colleague. Nevertheless, I....I....I was always aiming to stab Ark-nim in the back. Kuaak.....! I really am terrible. I’m not even human. I’m disqualified from being a human!’

But he was only impressed for a few seconds.

“I need you to pack all the items here before dying!”

‘This son of a bitch, am I just a bag?’

Buksil’s face wrinkled after Ark’s comment. Anyway, Ark raised his body and stared at Magaro. But there wasn’t fear or confusion on Ark’s face. It was like someone finding a ray of happiness in the midst of despair.

‘I don’t know how it happened.....this is an opportunity. If I kill Magaro then Magaro’s ownership of the items would disappear. And I can obtain Magaro’s legacy!’

At first he was scared thanks to the horror like scene. But he couldn’t forget the hideous appearance in the face of money. Even if the girl who crawled out of the TV or a nine-tailed fox begged him or the person from Friday the 13th held a chainsaw and threatened him.....he would welcome it anytime if they gave him more items. Thanks to that, Magaro now appeared like a roll of bank notes to Ark.

‘I’m going to kill you.’ And even ‘I will inherit the legacy.’ Those were the only words he cared about!

At the thought of money, Ark became cool-headed in the battle.

‘Gauging from the previous impact, he’s not an opponent to be trifled with. In addition, he probably has some special attacks while I’m fighting blindly. The first rule of victory is to fight in the most favourable conditions!’

“Why are you just sitting down stupidly? Follow me! Dedric, Razak, run!”

Ark grabbed Buksil by the collar and bolted.

“That dirty rat.....I will not miss it!”

Magaro cried and pursued them.

However, Ark used 'Sprint' to escape the pursuit.

"Ark-nim!"

Lariette had been sitting near the entrance of the cave with a worried face and stood up when she saw them. Then she screamed at the ugly form of Magaro chasing them.

"Kyaaak, that, that is.....?"

"I don't have time to explain in detail. Please buff me!"

"Huh? Oh, yes! Warrior's strength, Virtuous Vitality, Pure light!"

Lariette stacked three buffs on him. Virtuous Vitality increased his strength and stamina for 3 minutes and increased his health while Pure light improved his mana regeneration.....

While the Innocence Knight had less combat abilities than a Holy Knight, its buffs were stronger. Of course, the skill level was lower so it wasn't as effective as Alan's. But it was a hundred times better than nothing. Furthermore, Lariette's buff affected all her allied so it applied to Buksil, Ark and his summons as well. The combat abilities of the whole party rose sharply.

'That's it.'

Ark stopped and turned around. Then he shouted while using Riposte against the approaching Magaro.

"A-1 plan. Detric, Razak, take position on the right and left."

"Understood!"

Clack clack clack clack, ttadadak!

"Lariette-nim, please attack him from behind. Virtuous Vitality is more concerned with attack than defense so we will concentrate on attacking from 4 directions."

"Yes, I'll try it!"

Lariette looked fearfully at Magaro but she wasn't a child. In such a situation, it wasn't possible to sit down and be scared.

"Buksil, retreat a safe distance!"

“Yes, let’s do it!”

Buksil answered boldly and ran away. While Ark attracted Magaro’s attention, Lariette and his summons got into their positions and surrounded him. Then Ark used his Elemental Sword Fire attribute, Dedric Dark Dash, Razak and Lariette Shield Stroke and attacked Magaro simultaneously.

“Kuaaak, these people.....!”

The attacks struck like a storm and instantly reduced Magaro’s health by 30%. Of course, Magaro wasn’t an insignificant opponent. He was level 500. The 10 arms also moved back and forth in a bizarre series of attacks. Perhaps Ark would’ve been struggling if he was alone. However, Ark wasn’t alone. He had been steadily feeding his pets food to raise their stats while Lariette had graduated with honours from Ark’s spartan training over the last 10 days.

‘Teaching is really rewarding.’

Ark smiled warmly at Lariette. Of course, looking from the viewpoint of the teacher there was still a lot more for her to learn. But it was still a rewarding experience since Lariette was useful now. The best advantage of an Innocence Knight was that they could use recovery magic while wearing heavy armour!

“Healing Touch!”

Lariette used healing magic regularly between attacking and defending. A warrior receiving recovery magic was the difference between life and death in a battle! Ark was able to concentrate freely on attacking without worrying about his health.

“These guys.....how dare these thieves.....I cannot forgive!”

Finally Magaro’s health was reduced to 50%. He once again received a critical hit from Gwisal’s sword and fell to one knee. At the same time Magaro’s body turned red.

‘Double critical chance! This is a chance!’

Ark rushed forward like a wolf. Something unthinkable occurred. The blisters on Magaro’s 10 arms moved and scattered. When it came back, he was holding potion bottles in each of his hands.

“You wanted my research materials? Huhuhu, okay, take it! This is the result of my research!”

Hwiririk, pepeng, pepeng, kukwakwakwang!

Magaro threw the 10 bottles onto the ground where multiple explosions took place.

Flames and poison gas, lightning and winds.....!

You have received lightning damage from the explosion. 150 damage.

You have received fire damage from the explosion. 250 damage.....

He received all sorts of attribute damage.

The bottles that Magaro threw were filled with explosive liquid of different attributes. Fortunately, Ark had some resistance to all the attributes thanks to the Mongoose immortality pill. But his fire resistance went down to -25% thanks to the use of Elemental Sword so he received 250 damage thanks to the additional damage. That was not the whole problem. Magaro swallowed a potion and his health increased. He also stored recovery potions.

“Kukuku, how is it? Stupid bastards.....this is the power of alchemy!”

Magaro went on a drinking spree of recovery potions.

“No, this son of a bitch.....!”

Magaro transferred the recovery potions to two arms while throwing the explosive potions with the remaining arms.

“Huk, Radun, swallow the potion!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun shot out and swallowed the explosive potions at Ark's command.

-Radun has acquired the Fire Explosive potion.

But no matter how it tried, Radun couldn't swallow 8 potions at once. Radun could only swallow one while the seven remaining exploded.

Kkukkukkukku, kkukwang, kwakwakwakwang!

It seemed like bombs were falling from the sky. Ark used 'Dark Dance' to avoid the blast range but it was impossible in a narrow cave. He barely managed to avoid everything and receive Lariette's recovery magic. Then Magaro turned his eyes to Lariette.

“Bah! You dare.....botch my excellent work....!”

‘No, Lariette-nim is not at the level where she can avoid the explosive potions!’

Ark sprinted past Magaro to reach Lariette. Then he shouted while rotating his body.

“Lariette-nim! Raise your weapons!”

“Huh?”

Lariette automatically raised her weapons. At the same time, Ark ran up and hit her shield with Riposte.

“Kyaak!”

Lariette was pushed back 10 metres and fell. At the same time, an intense explosion took place in Ark’s vicinity. A message window appeared in front of Ark. He had lost 1,500 health from that attack.

“Oh Ark-nim! Healing Touch, Healing Touch!”

Lariette identified the situation and immediately healed him. However, Magaro’s damage was more than the amount she could recover. There was no chance to fight back properly. Even if he dealt a critical hit, Magaro would just restore his health using recovery potions. It was impossible for the minor attacks of his pets to deal any damage. He used the 10 different potions like water to deal damage.

‘Damn....how am I supposed to defeat him when he keeps throwing potions?’

With the potions exploding everywhere, his summons were already not following his commands.

“Ugh, fire, fire!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

They just ran back and forth trying to save their lives. And the potions also exploded against the capsule walls which smashed everywhere. The sticky fluid inside the capsules and the monsters’ corpses scattered everywhere.

‘Dammit, is he just going to destroy everything?’

Then Ark had a sudden thought as the chimera bodies scattered.

‘Wait! He uses potions.....then.....?’

"Lariette, please escape outside while I distract this guy!"

"Huh? B-but.....!"

"I don't have time to explain, quickly!"

Lariette hurriedly exited the cave at Ark's words.

"Dedric, Razak, you guys leave the cave too!"

"What? Master! What are you talking about? We'll die together!"

Clack clack, clack clack clack!

Dedric and Razak shouted ridiculously. Normally he would be disgusted but it was very praiseworthy in this moment. However Ark had an idea. He explained it telepathically to Dedric who grinned and nodded.

"Indeed! Master's shrewd plan has started again!"

"Stop talking nonsense.....get out quickly. I don't have the time. I can only hold on for 10 minutes. If you don't do as planned in 10 minutes then I will 100% die. Do you understand?"

"You don't have to worry!"

Dedric and Razak bolted out of the cave while holding the parcel Ark gave them.

"Now, let's see what 1-on-1 is like. You'll win if you kill me within 10 minutes!"

"Huhuhu, how dare....!"

Magaro smirked and threw the bottles. Ark gave up on counterattacking and used a combination of Slide and Dark Dance to avoid the bottles. Then he ran out of the cave at a suitable time. He had lost an extra 20~30% of his health from the explosive potions.

"Sheesh, jumping into a dungeon blindly was a mistake.'

His dark attribute bonus was unconditionally applied inside the dungeon. There was no reason to wait until evening so he entered during the day. When he exited outside, his 40% attribute bonus was turned off.

'But....'

"Radun, give me 10 dark attribute magic ingredients!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out one magical ingredient after another. Ark put the ingredients into the lamp and fuel and pulled the lever. At the moment, the surrounding area darkened like a curtain was pulled around it.

-For 30 minutes, the Dark Lamp will maintain the state of night-time.

A Dark attribute bonus (all stats + 40%) will be applied.

"Rarukan's Ring, activate Dark Protection!"

When he lifted the ring and raised his voice, Ark was wrapped in a black aura. It was the option from Rarukan's ring which raised his defense and magic resistance by 20%! Of course, this 'Dark Protection' could only be activated in the dark but that was no problem with the Dark Lamp. Ark used Slide and Dark Dance like crazy. The reason he exited the cave was because he couldn't escape the range of the explosive potions inside the narrow cave. If he used the wide forest and two skills appropriately then Ark could minimize the damage. But it was raining and his clothes were wet. Ark's health frantically decreased from the overflowing potions and he was soon in a critical condition. Thankfully, the Magic Protection from Galgashi's Fur also activated and Magaro was frozen for a little bit.

'Damn....It's already been 15 minutes....'

Ark glanced around but there was still no sign of Lariette of Dedric. Meanwhile, the flames decreased his health to 3%.

'No, just a bit more!'

Ark watched the exploding potions with desperate eyes.

"That's it Master! Go, Razak!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

He heard the distant sound of Razak's voice. It was at that time. The surrounding bushes shook and black shadows emerged. Then the explosive potions suddenly disappeared before his eyes.

"Huk! W-what....yes, you guys are....Chimera!"

Yes, it was the rotten Bandit Foxes that emerged from the forest.

Ark had seen the stiff bodies of the Bandit Foxes when the capsules broke and devised this plan. The monsters wouldn't come close to the cave thanks to the strange smells. But it was different when controlled by Razak's Death's Equations. He had used Buksil, Lariette, Dedric and Razak for this plan. Previously, he had hunted the Bandit Foxes using Nadingka's fruit. He was worried that Lariette would be unable to capture the foxes but thankfully they managed to hunt the Bandit Foxes and turned them into zombies. Well, poor Razak's ribs also decreased again.....his abilities had started to decrease after evolving. Anyway, thanks to that the battle changed completely. Ark placed Gwisal's sword across his shoulder and laughed.

"Now, let's see if you can throw those damn potions."

"This ...This bastard ...!"

Magaro once again threw the explosive potions. But the Bandit Foxes just rushed forward and swallowed them. Ark faked being startled.

"Eh? Where is the bottle? Wow, weird?"

"This, those stupid bastards.....don't even know who their Master is....!"

Magaro was furious at the betrayal of the foxes that he had created. But it didn't matter if he was their creator. The really important thing was how he raised them. Ark had raised Dedric and Razak from a useless bat and skull and Radun from an egg with affection.

"Are you finished? Now it's my turn? Lariette-nim, recovery magic, please!"

"Yes, Healing Touch!"

Lariette belatedly used her recovery magic.

"Now, here I go. Demonic Opening!"

Kiyaaaaak!

Ghostly wails emerged from Gwisal's sword. Ark began to pound on Magaro with his sword. His health was sucked out. In an instant his health fell to 50% and Magaro retreated before pulling out a recovery potion. However, the recovery potion was a Bandit Fox's favourite item. The foxes swarmed at the opportunity and swallowed the potion.

"This, these bastards.....go away!"

“Where are you looking? Your opponent is me!”

Gwisal’s sword continuously found Magaro’s bare flesh. His remaining life instantly went down to 10%. Without the explosive potions, Magaro was just a big hulking monster. However, Ark didn’t deal a fatal blow and just gradually chipped away at his life. Once it reached 8%, Magaro tried to escape towards the cave.

“You’re trying to run away? I’m sorry but I can’t allow that. Go, Sprint!”

Ark shot forward and swung his sword downwards. At the same time, Magaro’s body fell apart and black blood poured out.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

Thanks to drastic measures, a x1.4 experience was applied. Constant message windows appeared and he levelled up 7 times. In addition, the cross symbol appeared above Lariette’s and Buksil’s head. Despite the 100 level difference between them, they still gained 6~7 levels even with the experience penalty.

“That’s it! Success!”

But Ark was more interested in the items than the experience. Ark looked at the falling items.

Magaro’s Dimensional Movement Powder Bag <20 kilograms>

A genius alchemist, Magaro created many amazing magic items after long years of studying.

He refined this powder from a mysterious fairy which allows him to move between dimensions. If an appropriate amount of this powder is used to draw a circle, you can create a dimensional gate between the Netherworld and Middle earth. The amount of people able to be moved will depend on the amount of powder and the magic circle, with a larger circle requiring more powder. However, the effect disappears if the magic circle is damaged.

<Netherworld=Magic gate between Middle earth>

Magaro’s Deluxe Alchemy Tools <Rare>

Item type: Magic tools

User Restriction: Advanced alchemy skill

A set of tools made by the genius alchemist Magaro a long time ago. These specially created tools are made using special materials and techniques and allow a higher standard of work compared to the normal tools. In addition, the high quality tools means there is chance of creating a more powerful effect in products created. A skilled alchemist might be able to make an amazing discovery with these tools. Not that many great tools like these are easily available.

<Passive effects for owners: Wisdom +20, Intelligence +20, Luck +10>

<Special Option: Success rate of products produced +30% and probability of the best item being made +10%>

‘Alchemy tools?’

Magaro’s alchemy tool was a heavy bag filled with tools. Inside was filled with all sorts of equipment for experiments such as grinders or beakers. Alchemy was originally a profession that required a lot of money. The reason was that magic ingredients were expensive and the likelihood of failure was higher than blacksmithing or tailoring. Of course, if they kept on creating the same item then the proficiency would rise while the rate of failure would fall. Of course, they needed the related alchemy skills to create new prototypes. In that case, the failure rate was 3 times other professions. The failure rate was many times greater. So the items that alchemists needed most were ones that raised the success rate! A success rate of 30% was like creating an ‘A la carte’ dish with a 10% option attached. They were the coveted items that alchemists desired most.

‘I don’t know the prices of alchemist supplies.....but this is worth at least tens of millions of won!’

Next was the dimensional movement object that he obtained. Fortunately he could now return to middle earth anytime.

‘But the quantity is limited so I have to use it sparingly. If the information is released to the public then a swarm of people will gather. I have to take advantage of all the experiences and items in the Netherworld first.’

“Now all that’s left is the lab.”

There was a slight problem but now Magaro was gone. The laboratory was in Ark's possession. Ark returned to the laboratory. And he brought his hand to the bookcase to find the first quest item. In the past Magaro had appeared and now Buksil let out a wild burst of laughter.

"Huhuhuhu."

Buksil pointed the magic projector towards Ark and said.

"That's far enough Ark. Honestly, I wavered for a moment but you've disappointed me. So now I will say it without any problems. I'm sorry but the things here....."

"What?"

Ark unconsciously turned his head. And.....his outstretched hands felt something strange. He had extended his hand to reach for a book. But his hand just passed through the bookcase like it was a mirage.

"Eh? What on earth.....?"

Ark reached out again dumbly. But his hands just passed through the bookcase no matter what he did. He tried to pick up other stuff but it was the same. Stacked up potions, books or scrolls.....he couldn't pick up anything.

"What the? What the hell is going on?"

Ark was perplexed and explored the laboratory. Then Lariette standing at the entrance lifted a think booklet and said.

"Ark-nim, I'm able to touch this book."

Ark hurriedly ran and opened the booklet. The booklet.....no, to be precise it was Magaro's diary. He had recorded the entire confusing solution down.

Page 157

It has been 30 years since I've come to the Netherworld.

But I still haven't obtained the knowledge I desire.

No, I haven't even figured out how to return to middle earth from the Netherworld.

What I want is just..... But I know I don't have that much time left. But I can't just die like this. What meaning will there be to my life if I just die without anything to show for it?

Page 328

I've finally made my decision after long years of struggling.

I am going to synthesize the materials here and evolve into a chimera.

It's a forbidden technique that has been taboo to all alchemists for a long time! But this is not for my personal greed.

I'm now in the final stretch of my long research period. And I firmly believe that the topic I've dedicated my life to will change the world. I will do whatever it takes to complete my research.

Page 402

Fortunately, the first experiment seems to be successful.

I can finally feel some energy in my body which has been weakened for a long time. My spirit has cleared and I think I can bring an end to the research.

Page 420

There is something strange.

Sometimes I cannot repress my desires.

And it is difficult to remember the days.

Some side effects of the experiment?

I'm worried.

Page 459

Ah, what have I done?

Why does some of the laboratory 'not exist in this world anymore? It is clearly the effect of an experiment.

Perhaps this phenomenon is what took place in the Netherworld a long time ago. If so, I have gotten one step closer to the answer. But I don't remember what I did.

Oh my god, now I can't touch the documents with my many years of research on it....! All I can touch is my diary.

However, even what I wrote in the diary is unknown.

Who am I? Why am I here?

What happened to me?

I do not know I....I.....Tricked?

By whom....?

'Then Magaro turned himself into a chimera?'

After that the genius alchemist just focused on his research.....no, he directly wrote down the process. After remodelling his body, he experience short-term memory loss and dementia as a side effect. Even if he was smart didn't mean his life was smooth-sailing. A message window appeared when Ark read the final part of the diary.

Quest has been updated.

<Genius Alchemist's Laboratory>=<Study the Mirage>

You've found the hidden laboratory by following in the footsteps of the Genius Alchemist. However, you could not touch anything in the laboratory despite all your efforts. Magaro has disappeared so you have no idea why this is happening. If you want to get your hands on Magaro's research then you'll have to figure it out on your own.

<Difficulty: ???>

'Dammit....it wasn't finished once I found the laboratory?'

Annoyance rose in his stomach. How much time had he invested to get here? Starting from the key in the Magic Institute to the arena and Salrin's' Towers, he obtained all the clues to enter the Netherworld. And he finally came to the Netherworld. After suffering and almost dying in the Abyss of Despair, he had finally figured out the location of the lab in the Netherworld. And now it was an 'Updated' rather than a 'Complete?' What kind of absurd situation was this?

'So my great reward has just rolled away?'

It was to the extent that he wanted to give up the quest. But had he suffered so much just to give up now?

'I can only touch this diary in the laboratory. But Magaro wrote in the diary that he didn't know how to deal with the phenomenon that happened in the laboratory. Then I have to search elsewhere to figure out what happened here.....'

But Ark didn't worry for that long.

Ark knew only one village in the Netherworld, the village in the valley. And didn't it have the old man Beseutyu? His family business was to record everything that happened in the area so he might have some idea of this phenomenon.

'The phrase in the diary 'what happened in the Netherworld a long time ago' seems to be a hint.'

So Ark decided his next destination. He would revisit the valley village.

'But before that.....'

Ark summarized the situation and glanced at Buksil.

"Yes, what were you going to tell me? Please say it."

"Huh? Oh, no.....that....."

Buksil rolled his eyes anxiously and said.

"As expected from Ark-nim. Hehehe, yes that's what I wanted to say. I only survived because of Ark-nim and Lariette-nim."

'Hrm, what a sneaky guy. He's definitely hiding something.'

Ark briefly glared at Buksil. Ark knew that there was something strange. Buksil was a merchant and had no chance of winning against Ark. Buksil probably knew this better than anyone else. But why would he risk death to follow Ark? Obviously there was something that Ark didn't know. Something that made him think he could steal the legacy from Ark..... But what was it? A skill Ark didn't know about? A scroll? An item?

'If I hit him then I might be able to figure it out.....'

Anyway, there was still some time before he could obtain the legacy. And Buksil could still be used for a variety of things. The pig could be used for picking up ingredients, as a second bag, for money transactions when he needed it and to also finish filming the video. After calculating it in his head, Ark just nodded.

“I’m thankful that you’re admitting it.”

“Aigoo, what kind of.....it is natural.”

“Is that right?”

“Hehehe, of course.”

Buksil rolled around giggling and beat at his forehead with his feet. Lariette didn’t know the relationship between the two so was just confused.

“Now, let’s return to the village in the valley. I’ve already figured out the way so it shouldn’t take that long. Radun, can you carry 3 people?

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun answered positively. So Ark headed towards the valley village on Radun.

But Ark couldn’t imagine what lay ahead. While running towards the valley village, he never knew that this quest would not just affect the Netherworld, but the entirety of New World as well. And it would also have a huge impact on Ark’s adventure.....

Act 2: A Heartless City

“Huh? Nothing?”

“Yes, some came in a month ago but it was sold out immediately.”

“Then when will they come in again?”

The shabby looking merchant asked in a desperate tone. The specialty store owner just shrugged and shook his head.

“I don’t know either. Sometimes it might be a couple of months and other times it is six months. But it usually takes 4 months. Aside from the delivery date, the quantity

might be very low so we would see out immediately. Well, it can't be helped with rare items."

"T-that can't be...."

When the merchant whimpered, the shop owner smiled and raised his finger.

"Although you're quite lucky."

"Huh?"

"Our store has a sale for guests visiting from distant places every year. All of the items on display will be sold for a 15% discount. Only until the end of this week. How about it? You've travelled all this way so why don't you buy something? This place is small but there are many rare specialty items around. You'll get a much better price than in other provinces."

The shop owner made noises about a sale and slashed prices. If a stranger heard such talk then of course they would be tempted. But the merchant looked at the shelves and shook his head.

".....No, thank you."

There was a difference between a general user and specialty merchants. When trading with NPCs, the general users didn't have to worry about the price. The prices at stores such as general or weapon stores varied in different villages. There was no reason for the users to pay a big price. On the other hand, specialty merchants were different. The prices between areas were significantly large and the price would often soar or slump depending on different circumstances. Not only that, but NPCs at specialty stores would often deceive them and sell it for the previous slump price. And they didn't hesitate to push forward unpopular stock in a sale like now. The merchants who naively believed in the NPCs words would become bankrupt overnight. Transactions between an shop owner and merchant was like a sword match.

"Just think about it. It is difficult to get such quality stuff elsewhere. And isn't there a sale? Okay, if you buy items worth 100 gold even with the 15% discount then I will give you a special gift."

If the shop owner went this far then his inventory was 100% unable to be sold.

"That's okay. I'll come back."

"Hmm, too bad. I might've even given you 2 special gifts.... If you change your mind then come anytime."

The shop owner was truly persistent. The merchant shook his head and waved before exiting the store.

"Bah, who is he trying to scam? I can tell just by looking at the half price inventory. Anyway, even a remote country place doesn't have any."

The user grumbling was none other than the hobbit merchant, Sid. If it was the past then he probably would've been fooled by that sale. But now Sid was different from his old self. After tasting the bitterness and sweetness of Ark's friendly care (?), he had grown quite experiences as a merchant. No, Sid had also obtain a large amount of fame in Nagaran as a merchant. His hard work played a role in building that fame, but it was also because of Nagaran's complicated situation.

"Two months has passed since Ark-nim left Silvana....."

Sid muttered and recalled the past. In the meantime, there had been a lot of changes among the 12 estates. Thanks to the guild sieges, the Lords changes so many times that it was hard to keep track. But a time of stability came after all the confusion. Among the many guilds challenging the Lord's seat, many could not survive the war of consumption and several successful alliances appeared. And once the alliance captured the seat, they firmly held it. There were 5 alliances in Nagaran! Once the 5 alliances occupied a seat, the area completely changed. The majority of guilds were not satisfied with one castle.

The first target of a user was to occupy a castle and become a lord. Once they became a lord, they could earn an honorary title of Viscount. And that was just the starting point. If they used their forces to occupy 3 castles then they could earn the honorary title of Earl. The dividends from the castles would also increase. If they managed to obtain 6 estates then they would be promoted to Marquis. And if they managed to get all 12 estates in Nagaran then they would receive the honorary title of 'Public King.' Although the information about 'Public King' was unknown, it was clearly the best title available. The revenue obtained would be unimaginable! It was a place where money and fame was obtained from blood. So obviously Nagaran would be plunged into the era of 'War of Conquest.'

However, the forces of the 5 alliances were almost equal. None of them had the strength to capture another castle. No, there couldn't afford to show their ambitions even if they had reserve forces. If they revealed things too soon then the remaining forces would strike at them first. So the 5 alliances held each other in check while the lesser guilds engaged in a war of consumption for the other castles. In human history, the larger powers would be plunged into a cold war while the minor powers

fought against each other. The necessary requirement to survive in this cold war period was economic power. The 5 alliances had already seen this and poured money into their estate and focused on development. They would then invest in military forces when the rating of the manor increased and they received more income.

So after one month.....one of the five alliances rose to prominence. It was the Hermes Alliance which occupied Silvana directly. In the past, Alan and Ark had recognized the geographical advantage of Silvana. Once the Hermes Alliance firmly grasped Silvana, they invested a lot of money into it and became the first estate to be promoted to a C class estate. And the most significant contribution to their development was the trading post that Ark had the foresight to build. Once the lord changed, the trading post was renamed to 'Continental Commerce Firm' and received the tax from it, keeping them one step ahead of the other estates.

"Huhuhuhu, behind them is the Kerobon Sid."

Sid smiled with satisfaction. Sid got a job in the Continental Commerce Firm thanks to Ark. The chairman of the firm was the NPC with a fanatic belief in Ark, Wolkosu. Thanks to the escalator promotion, Sid was now the business manager. He handled the purchase of all good for the Continental Firm and oversaw the sales. In one week, Sid had already moved through 10,000 gold. Thanks to these enormous transactions, Sid's various skills went up like crazy. Thanks to the experience from each transaction, Sid had long passed level 200. And not too long ago, he received the title of Kerobon that every merchant fantasized about.

"Oh, that person.....Sid!"

"He's the legendary merchant who moved thousands of gold in one week!"

"In just two months he was promoted to the foreign department of the Continental Commerce Firm"

"Weren't his results recognized a short time ago and he received the title of Kerobon from the Midus Merchants guild?"

"That's right, the decoration on his chest is only provided to merchants who have received the title of Kerobon."

"Amazing, how many people have received the title of Kerobon?"

"But that's not all. A Kerobon merchant is able to receive VIP treatment from guilds and can get deluxe information. It is incredibly obvious what would happen with the deluxe information. His funds are probably sufficient to create 1~2 guilds."

Whenever Sid appeared at a trading place or the Merchants guild, he was the source of envy for all merchants.

‘Huhuhu, respect. More respect!’

Sid puffed up every time. But occasionally people in the street were puzzled.

“But why would someone with so much money dress like that?”

“Yeah. Doesn’t he smell like poverty?”

Sid was wearing low level clothes. Moreover, he was so busy that he had no time to wash them properly.

“I guess rich people don’t care about their attire.”

The merchants nodded and continued speculating. But Sid’s thoughts flared up at those words.

‘Are your eyes bad? How dare you take such a pretentious air when talking about me? Damn, I have no money to eat let alone buy clothes!’

Yes, he was the foreign business manager of the Continental Firm! The merchant who moved 10,000 gold in one week! The Kerobon recognized by the merchant guild..... These facts painted him in an amazing light. But the reality was that he only earned as much as a salary man in the firm. Of course, he now had a monthly salary consisting of his wage and bonuses. It was enough for other merchants to eat and even become rich if careful. However, most of those earnings were seized by Ark.

‘Huk.....that’s why I shouldn’t fall into debt.’

At first, Ark seized 50% of Sid’s revenue. But once his earnings became better, Sid was sent this message through Roco.

-I heard your salary climbed a lot? Shouldn’t you pay off your debt first before earning money? Tell Wolkosu to send 90% of Sid-nim’s monthly salary to me.

.....A devilish human.

Thanks to that, his increased monthly salary withered and he became even more destitute. But was that all? He also often made Sid run errands. The reason Sid left Nagaran and came to this remote village was because of Ark. Not long ago, Ark once again delivered a message through Roco.

"Ark-oppa needs 'Unicorn Horns' for Lancel Village."

"Huh? How many?" The rehabilitation brothers can only prepare 4,000 gold."

'Dammit, does he want me to lose my hair? My hands? Not once has he given me an expense fee!'

The reason Sid couldn't lose his temper? He still needed to pay Ark back 3,600 gold....

".....I understand. Give me the money."

Sid sighed and replied. Then Roco asked him in a puzzled voice.

"What money?"

"I need the money to buy the items."

"Oh, that? In fact, the rehabilitation brothers don't have the money yet."

"Then how do you want me to buy it?"

"I don't know.....Ark oppa said that Sid-nim is a Kerobon? Isn't a Kerobon allowed to borrow 4,000 gold from the Merchants guild? Just bring it to Lancel Village and we'll settle the bill."

"Eh?"

Sid was outraged. How could he accept that? Of course, as a Kerobon Sid was eligible to apply for a loan from the Merchants Guild. However, the loan was literally a debt. The procedure to apply was quite complicated and he needed to pay interest as well. But was that all? Once he applied for a loan, his credit rating was significantly slashed. First he had to pay back Ark.....and now he was being sent on an errand without being given once penny and would end up in further debt?

But Sid soon changed his mind. The purchase requester was Ark. He wasn't evil, but he would always pay people back. So he wasn't worried about that if he received a loan.

The loan scheme administered by the Merchants Guild had rules. The merchants guild's loan wasn't exactly borrowing gold. If they used the Merchants Guild's name as a guarantor, they could purchase items without gold. That is.....when applying for a loan from the Merchants guild, they offered an credit note. The merchant would be able to purchase items from the NPCs with the credit limit on the credit

note. However, there was one limitation. The person issued the credit not must have the equivalent amount in their possession, whether it be gold or goods.

In order words, the items had to be worth 4,000 gold. In this case, if the trader only had goods worth 1,000 gold then they needed another 3,000. If their remaining belongings and goods didn't equal 4,000 gold then they would become bankrupt until the guild could reclaim the loan. It was a situation to prevent selling the borrowed gold outside of the game. If he happened to sell at a loss (e.g. meeting a thief during the determined trading period) and wasn't able to pay off the loan, the merchant would become bankrupt. It was a bad reminder of the old days when Sid owed a debt to the Merchants Guild. Anyway, thanks to this rule he could afford to buy Ark's items at reasonable prices.

'The person I can believe in the most in this world is Ark-nim. If I get a bad credit rating from the loan then surely he'll rescue me? Yes, it should be safe to go on.'

So Sid went to Selebrid where he was issued a credit not and had his credit rating cut. Then he went to the auction in Giran to find the Unicorn Horns. Forgotten memories flashed through his head.

"Wait, it was Unicorn Horns? I think I've seen that somewhere before? Oh, that's right!"

Merchants often visited the NPCs in poultry stores or the Merchants guild to obtain information on specific items.

'It's just a rumour so it is up to you to believe it or not.' Those words were 100% associated with information to make money. Among them, Sid had heard someone mention Unicorn Horns a while ago.

"Aren't the prices of Unicorn Horns rising these days? So I did a little digging. In a mountain village not far from Giran, there is a specialty store that sometimes sells Unicorn Horns."

The NPC whispered as he came close.

"There isn't a lot of them, but you can buy it for a relatively cheaper price than the market price. Well, it's still very expensive but you can likely afford it. If you're near Giran then you should stop by once."

He had registered the information and then forgot about it. But it was a great opportunity if true.

"The money Ark-nim allowed to purchase the Unicorn Horns is 4,000 gold. The present market price is 1,000 gold so he intended to get 4. But if I can get it for cheaper than market price.....wouldn't I be able to get the remaining money? Even if I buy it for 50 gold cheaper, that is still 400 gold!"

Sid's eyes gleamed at the thought of gold. While purchasing items for the Continental Firm, everything was recorded down. Isn't this a chance to get around those records? He wouldn't feel remorse, even if the opponent was Ark. Sid immediately turned around and headed towards the village selling Unicorn Horns. However, the result was a total failure! Other merchants had been told about the speciality store and already bought it. Sid had been brought to reality from his land of dreams and sighed.

"Che, I thought I could pay off a lot of my debt....."

He owed Ark 3,600 gold. He became gloomy when he thought about it. Sid sighed and took out a big piggy bank from his bag.

"I can only believe in one thing."

It was an item he had obtained by chance on one of his merchant quests.

Lucky Pig of Good Fortune <Special>

Item type: Piggy Bank

User restriction: Merchant

A nice piggy bank surrounded by gold light.

An old item that had been gathering dust on top of a mountain. If you're aiming to become rich as a merchant, you can't forget the importance of small money. This piggy bank is important for people who cherish small money and the money won't be able to be withdrawn until it is full.

<You can save 1 gold once a day. When you reach the maximum amount of 100 gold, you can receive a bonus 10~30%>

1 gold every day was 100 gold.

After 100 days, he could receive a bonus 10~30 gold. The only pleasure Sid received while under this debt will filling the piggy bank.

"Huhuhu, it is half full. Yes, it's best to make money safely. If I can sneak one or two gold away from Ark-nim then someday I'll earn my independence."

The hobbit's grand dream of becoming the best merchant on the continent suddenly turned into gaining independence from Ark.

Clink, clink.

Sid felt better after hearing the sound of coins in the pig's stomach. Even though Sid was a Kerobon, he had lost his vigour.

"Now is now the time to be doing this. I have to hurry. If I'm late then I might suffer some criticism."

"Haaayaahh!"

Sid heard it as he was about to leave the village. All of a sudden, a loud cry was heard from one side. Sid automatically turned his head and saw the person exercising in the moonlight.

"Hat, hat, hat, hat! The 5,000 yelling regime is over! Next is kicks!"

"What the? That man?"

Sid asked with a puzzled look. No matter how much he looked the user was clearly a merchant covered in bags. But somehow the shape was different. What sane merchant would yell and kick on a vacant lot?

In addition, what was that?

"Kuaaak.....damn, it broke again. Ugh!"

The merchant frantically kicking the tree groaned and grabbed his swollen ankle. In order to maintain a sense of realism in New World, users who received an injury would receive a shock. However, that shock was at a similar level to static electricity. It wasn't to the extent that it would be painful. But the merchant was really moaning like a person who broke his leg. Sid couldn't understand. The person suffering in front of him was really experiencing the pain of a broken leg.....

Yes, it was the only user in New World who suffered realistic pain! The merchant was Lee Myung-ryong, no Isyuram. Sid had visited the village was Isyuram was modifying his body. Thus Sid and Isyuram had a fateful encounter.....

"There really are strange people."

.....It hadn't even begun yet.

Sid jumped and quietly avoided that area. It wouldn't be good for a crazy person to notice him. So he once again rushed to the road that headed towards Giran. He had left the village for 10 minutes.

Grrrrrr.

The village was so remote that there was no path for Sid to walk along. So he was walking in the woods when a low cry was audible from a distant place.

'Huk, gnoll!'

Sid panicked and jumped behind some bushes to hide his body. Soon enough, four monsters with a dog's head approached.

'Grrrrrr, strange. I thought it was in this area....."

"No, I heard it too."

"Maybe it's that crazy merchant?"

At those words, the gnoll flinched and looked around with anxious faces. However, one gnoll shook his head and muttered.

"No, I would be able to smell him from a distance. Hold still. Kung kung kung, this is a different person. I think somewhere in the vicinity? It's faint but obviously near."

The gnoll sniffed and approached the bush.

'Ugh, why is it coming here? Huk, don't tell me.....?'

Sid quickly checked the information window frantically. After confirming that there was no lasting effects, his heart fell.

'Oh my god, has the effect of the [Safe Travel] scroll worn off?'

Even if they were highly ranked, a merchant had no combat abilities. Even a level 300 merchant wouldn't be able to beat a gnoll. That's why merchants always needed mercenaries when travelling a long distance. However, hiring mercenaries for a low level area didn't fit. He would obtain a loss instead of a profit if he hired mercenaries. That's why the Merchants Guild developed the special scroll [Safe Travel]. The effect lasted 2 hours and there was a low probability of being attacked by monsters. Even if they were right around the corner, a monster with a keen sense of smell wouldn't be able to notice him. Because of that, merchants only hired mercenaries when going to

high levelled areas and just used the [Safe Travel] scroll in low areas. Sid was level 200. When he used the scroll, it was impossible for him to be discovered by level 100 gnolls. However, the duration was 2 hours so he had used it once and forgot about it.

‘I need to quickly use the scroll before being discovered!’

Sid hurriedly opened his bag. But he couldn’t see the scroll no matter how much he looked.

‘T-this is....I was so busy applying for a loan in Selebrid that I forgot to buy a scroll!’

“Grrrrr, hiding in a place like this!”

“Ohh, how long has it been since we saw a hobbit?”

“Hehe, you’ve done excellently.”

The eerie voices surrounded the hobbit who looked up fearfully. Sid got up, screamed and tried to run away.

“Grrrrrr, do you think we will miss?”

“Take this!”

One of the gnolls threw his club. Pakak, the club collided with Sid’s back with a heavy sound.

-You have received a critical hit to your head. 400 damage!

<You are stunned and won’t be able to move for 10 seconds>

Kung kung kung kung!

The merchant became caught in a stunned state. He couldn’t see the approaching monsters but it was obvious. The gnoll swarmed around the stunned Sid and was about to beat him up. The stun lasted 10 seconds but Sid wouldn’t even last 10 seconds against the gnolls.

‘Damn.....my resurrection place is Selebrid.....’

Sid swallowed his bitterness. It was incredibly difficult for a merchant to reach level 200 and of course he didn’t want to die.

‘There’s nothing good about selecting a merchant. First I get treated like a bag by Ark-nim, then exploited because of my debt and now I’m about to become a dog’s food.....’

He was so miserable that he couldn’t even cry anymore. It was at that time. Just as he was in a critical condition, a voice singing ridiculous lyrics was unexpectedly heard in his ears.

“Where do you stand~ someone~ when anything happens.”

“.....?”

Sid turned his head puzzled. One man was slowly approaching with crossed arms.

‘Eh? That man is.....?’

The gnoll and Sid all gaped at that person. Sid had seen him before. It was Isyuram who had been exercising in the moonlight. Sid looked dismayed and sighed with disappointment.

‘Damn, I thought it was a warrior passing by.....but it’s just that strange man? I’m going crazy. That merchant just came here to be eaten.....’

Yes, there should be two bowls of dog food. However, Isyuram was still humming and didn’t grasp the mood.

“This, this, this, Isyuram~ tremendous energy~.”

In this situation, singing a 70s theme song.....he was indeed insane. But the gnolls’ reaction was surprising. The gnolls winced and retreated from the merchant.

“Grrrrrr. T-that guy.....?”

“The Mad Merchant! The Crazy Merchant!”

“Dammit, we didn’t see him for a few days so I had hoped he went somewhere else.....”

“He is still a merchant. Kill him!”

Kung kung kung kung!

Sid wasn’t in a shape where he could run away so he just watched. The gnolls flocked to Isyuram and swung their clubs. Isyuram just curled his lips and said.

"Heh, these guys aren't going to run away. Okay, then I'll show you the results of my training!"

Then.....Sid witnessed an incredible scene.

"Haaayaahh, Shoryuken! Adododo, jumping kick! Somersault kick!"

Merchant. No matter how much Sid looked, he saw a merchant. Nevertheless, he was almost equal to the gnolls! No, he was overwhelming. He was a merchant so he lacked defense and attack, but he avoided their attacks with amazing timing and counterattacked which had a high probability of being a critical hit. It was also surprising that he was able to use techniques such as shoryuken and jumping kick.

"Take that, Pile driver (wrestling technique)!"

Kueeeeeek!

He even grabbed the gnoll, jumped and drove it into the ground upside down. After 3 minutes, Isyuram had taken care of all 4 gnolls. Then Isyuram approached Sid who was making a ridiculous expression.

"Boy, are you okay?"

"Huh? Ah, yes....."

Sid looked at him stunned before asking.

"But aren't you a merchant?"

"Well, unfortunately I have such a shape."

"But a merchant against gnolls.....and four of them.....?"

"Huhuhu, Ryu and Ken, Chun Li and Zangief are all my teachers so of course the gnolls can't compare to me."

Isyuram rattled on in a smug voice. But after a moment, Isyuram's body stiffened and he paled. Then he flopped onto the ground as sweat dripped down his face.

"Ugh, d-damn.....indeed....this pain....can't get used to it....."

"W-what's wrong?"

"I-I'm okay.....this much..... I'll be fine after a little bit....."

Isyuram clenched his teeth and shook his head. No matter how he looked at the situation, it clearly wasn't normal. He appeared suddenly humming a 70s theme song, said that Ryu and Ken were his masters and then suddenly he looked like he was having a seizure? Sid didn't want to hang out with these sorts of people, but he couldn't just ignore him after being helped. Sid hesitated before sitting in front of him and waiting for the attack to end. Fortunately, Isyuram returned to normal after 10 minutes.

"Phew.....I've survived. Aye, you shouldn't have seen that in our first meeting."

"Ah, it's nothing."

Sid shook his head and asked with uneasy eyes.

"But what was that just then?"

"Heh, a hero's ordeal."

Isyuram replied with a smile. He couldn't understand as expected. But Sid didn't question it anymore. He was scared of what insane answer he would receive. And he had other questions.

"Then how was ajusshi able to defeat them while playing as a merchant?"

"I told you. Ken and Ryu, Chun Li and Zangief are my mentors....."

"Then who are they?"

"Eh? You don't know those names?"

Sid shook his head and Isyuram sighed while scratching his head.

"Hah, kids these days don't know about them? Hyu.....I really am old. To put it simply, they were people who burned martial arts into my soul in my childhood."

".....?"

"The gnolls were defeated after holding the images of my teachers in my heart. But it isn't easy using those skills. My bones have really suffered because I'm a merchant."

Isyuram recalled his memories of the past fortnight. Yes, he couldn't forget the fortnight of humiliation and suffering every day. As soon as Isyuram became dog food, he was immersed in his training. However, Isyuram was a merchant. His limbs couldn't keep up with his training and kept on breaking. That wasn't all. Sometimes he would fight against the gnolls to confirm his training and really felt the pain of

dying. Since the police's training unit was set to 'Reality,' he felt 100% of the pain inflicted on his character.

'Ugh.....it really is horrible. Why would anyone play the game while suffering such pain? No matter how fun the game is, isn't it too much? They would surely be hit in battles.....maybe everybody is a pervert?'

Isyuram couldn't understand it.

'Anyway, I can't just give up. Damn, this is a matter of pride. When will this body be able to defeat the gnolls?'

Of course, this problem would be solved if he just asked someone. However, who was Isyuram? In the game he was a merchant, but in reality he had been the captain of the number 1 SWAT team. How could he give up a game because of the pain when even a school kid could play it? It was a matter of pride now.

'I don't know anything about a merchant! I just have to try until I die!'

Every time he was hit by the gnolls, a cloud formed over his eyes. And he clung even more insanely to the game. One day a miracle happened. Once again he was fighting the gnolls with a broken wrist and ankle. Isyuram's pride had been injured so much that he just persisted and clung to their legs, biting.

"Kuaaak! This vicious child, stop biting!"

"Hik, is he infected with rabies?"

Was this a joke? The dogs were talking nonsense so he continued biting. Then a message window flashed in front of Isyuram.

-You have learned a new skill.

Self Defense <Beginner, Passive>: You have built up your body using basic training methods.

Self Defense is a skill that only non-combat professions can learn and it allows the user to show a minimal combat ability. It is possible to reduce the risk of injury using Self Defense <The battle penalty of a non-combat profession has been removed. Chances of injury is reduced by 30%.

-You have learned a new skill.

Invincible Spirit <Beginner, Passive>: You're a weed who never gives up despite the desperate situation. Even if a person with Invincible Spirit gets injured, it will not

interfere with their action in battle. In addition, if your health is reduced below 50% then you will enter the 'invincible state' and a bonus will be applied to your combat power. However, all damage received during the fight will be applied after the battle finishes.

<Invincible State: When your health falls below 50% <Attack power and resistance to abnormal states +10%>

If your health falls by 70% <Attack power +15% and resistance to abnormal states +20%>

If your health falls by 90% and you're in a critical condition <Attack power +20% and resistance to abnormal states +30%>

'Eh? What is this?'

Isyuram wasn't used to playing games and couldn't understand all the information in the message window. But it wasn't necessary for him to understand. Even if he couldn't understand it with his head, he could sense it in his body.

'Eh? What kind of thing is happening?'

In fact, this was the first time Isyuram fully grasped the gnolls' attack patterns. The simple attack pattern of the NPCs wasn't difficult for someone who had experienced actual fighting. But he was being slaughtered thanks to his insufficient merchant's body. With his ankle broken he couldn't move quickly enough let alone deal damage with a broken wrist. However the situation completely changed with Invincible Spirit. If he was injured in battle then it wouldn't interfere with his actions. Isyuram's fighting abilities had such a huge effect that it transcended common sense. In addition, he leaned a merchant only skill 'Self Defense' which was similar to the warrior's skill 'Sword Mastery.' Well, Isyuram was in a critical condition when he received these skills so he still died but now he could finally fight back.

"That's it, I can finally show the results of my training!"

Isyuram was completely delighted with the skill effects and went crazy. But that was Isyuram's mistake. In fact, Invincible Spirit was an illusionary skill. The additional stats were too fantastic. This skill couldn't be learned in a normal way. In the early stages of New World's production, there were a few skills that could only be learned using this method. However, feeling actual pain was too absurd so the development was stopped. Invincible Spirit was one of those skills. Of course, a general game unit

could never learn a skill like this. However, Isyuram believed 100% in his training and didn't doubt the execution.

And Invincible Spirit was actually the most dangerous among the aborted skills. There was a reason for this. One reason was that they might become too accustomed during a battle and then suffered huge penalties after the battle ended.

-The battle had ended and 'Invincible Spirit' has been automatically released. 'Invincible State' has been released and all injuries received during the battle applied.

Your wrist has broken thanks to the impact!

Your ankle has twisted due to moving beyond its limits!

Your ribs have cracked due to a blow.....

"Kuaaak, w-what is this?"

Again, Invincible Spirit wasn't a skill where he would receive no injuries during the battle. The injuries just wouldn't affect the body until the battle was over. And all those injuries would be applied at the same time. Experiencing at the same time a broken wrist, ankle, ribs.....it was so painful it felt like a truck had run over him! The reason Isyuram suddenly turned pale and started sweating was because of this penalty. An average person suffering this would've probably just fainted! He had astonishing mental strength to endure it but Sid only saw that he was having something that looked like a seizure.

Anyway, Isyuram then spend time smashing the gnolls around the village. He had caught three hundred gnolls during that period. Thus Isyuram could now completely identify the patterns of attack. Furthermore, he was able to reduce the probability of an injury but quite a lot thanks to Self Defense. So Isyuram finally felt the serious feeling of martial arts. Then it finally reminded him of a street fighting game that had been released a long time ago.

"Yes, it's better to enjoy the game a little bit."

Isyuram imitated the techniques of those characters and fought against the gnolls. So he made up some nonsense about Ryu and Ken etc. being his mentors.

"That.....are you okay?"

Sid's voice was suddenly heard from the side. Isyuram woke from his recollections with an embarrassed face and scratched his head.

"Well, I was a merchant at first but it was a fair bit of trouble.

"Indeed."

Sid nodded and realized that he was just as strange as Sid expected.

'I don't understand. If he would rather fight then why didn't he save money and change to a warrior profession? Does he have to be a merchant because of some circumstances?'

In New World, if they paid a fee of 200 gold then the former profession could be cancelled and an initial profession selected. And his predecessor had told Isyuram this information in the pile of documents left to him. As well as information about the pain settings..... All of Isyuram's efforts were indeed wasteful. But the information was so basic that Sid thought it was impossible for the level 150 Isyuram to not know it. If Isyuram became aware of the facts now..... Well, ignorance was bliss.

"Anyway, we've met like this so let's share a meal together."

Isyuram whistled and took out a pot. Sid was glad to hear those words. He had been so heavily in debt that Sid had only eaten wheat bread for a while. But he expected a proper meal after seeing Isyuram take out the pot. The joy only lasted a moment as Sid freaked out when he saw Isyuram prepare the ingredients.

"Hik, w-what are you doing?"

"What?" I'm making food?"

"N-no way.....you're going to eat the gnolls?"

"Ah, you've never eaten dog meat?"

"No, I've eaten dog meat....."

"Ah, you worried about eating the gnoll meat. I was wary at first but it turned out surprisingly fine once I ate it. It is really chewy like dog meat. And it's also good for the body."

Isyuram casually said as he sliced off the meat and placed it in the pot. Although Isyuram was a merchant, he had managed to discover a secret. It was impossible to make dishes with every type of meat in New World. However, the meat of a monster which wasn't classified as edible was toxic. The meat of a gnoll was toxic. Therefore most users never even considered cooking gnoll meat.

However, Isyuram just abandoned common sense and ate the meat of a gnoll. And the taste was really similar to dog meat. Isyuram was a fan of dog meat so he immediately liked the gnoll meat. Of course, the toxic gnoll meat caused an abnormal state but he didn't pay attention to such trivial problems.

"Well, this state won't cause me to die.....I will quickly recover. It's not like the meat has maggots. I can't abandon this taste just because of a little venom."

After making two hundred of the gnoll soup, he received an unexpected skill.

-You have learnt a new skill.

Bizarre cooking <Beginner, Passive>: You have an interest in making dishes out of bizarre monster meat. When bizarre cooking is used, it can neutralize the toxic monster meat. In addition, if you cook a certain monster more than a certain number of times then you will instil fear in the monster.

<After eating the flesh of a monster a certain number of times, you will instil fear in that type of monster. Fear will reduce their attack power in combat>

After eating all that dog meat, even wild dogs didn't dare come near him. The dogs instinctively felt afraid of someone addicted to dog meat. That fear was why Isyuram became a horrifying presence.

"Hrmm, everyone has ripened already. It won't take a long time to cook. Ah, this isn't supposed to fall in the soup."

Isyuram swallowed his saliva and pulled a bottle out of his bag. When he first started eating the dog soup, he stopped by the village's tavern and bought some drinks. Although the sake bottle cost 10 gold, Isyuram had no sense in regards to money. The expensive liquor soon spread through his whole body, making it feel hot. The glow made him feel rewarded for the pain he just suffered.

"Hahaha, being able to drink and eat dog soup is like heaven after everything I've suffered! After a little food and alcohol, my spirit will be purged until I feel hungry again. What the? Why aren't you eating?"

"No.....I....I'll just eat my wheat bread."

Sid said with a frown.

"I guess your taste buds are really picky. Then drink a cup of sake."

"But I'm still a minor?"

“It’s fine to drink with an adult.”

“Yes, then just a little....”

Sid cautiously took the cup.

‘He’s not that strange after all.’

At first he only drank one cup, then it turned to two and three before he eventually ended up drinking five cups. Sid had become so tipsy that he confessed his problems to Isyuram.

“.....So you came all the way here for an errand only to have to return in vain?”

Sid nodded at Isyuram who frowned.

“But did you say Ark? He seems like a bastard or a crook. What kind of person would make you fall into a debt and then exploit you? In addition, it is 3,000 gold so the interest is 1,000 gold? Even if this is a game.....shall I lend you a hand?”

“Hik, please stop.”

Sid panicked and waved his hands.

“Ajusshi doesn’t know how scary Ark-nim is. Ark-nim won’t take it silently.”

“Is he that strong?”

“It’s not just that he is strong. Ark-nim is definitely not a bad person. When we first met, he saved me from Leo a chaotic player.”

And then he extorted the escort price out of Sid.

“.....And he helped me when I was in really bad debt.”

In order to treat Sid like a walking bag.

“.....He also left me in charge of the enormous profits from the business in Cairo.”

Which caused him to obtain a debt of 4,000 gold.

He felt even more miserable after he spoke. Sid sighed and shook his head.

“Anyway, Ark-nim is not a bad person.....I think. He even got me a job to repay my debt and thanks to that I climbed a lot of levels.”

“Well that doesn’t matter.”

“But I have a serious problem going forward.”

“What?”

“I carelessly didn’t buy any [Safe Travel] scrolls. They’re only sold by the Merchant Guild in large cities.....I don’t know how I can make it to Giran.”

“I’ll come along.”

“Huh? Isyuram ajusshi?”

“Yes, I’m a little tired playing here so I thought of going somewhere else. And I have a reason to go to where people congregate. Giran is the nearest city around here? Then it would be better to go with someone who knows the way.”

“R-really? I would like that.”

“Okay, then let’s go.”

Isyuram finished the remaining alcohol and jumped up. Then he escorted Sid towards Giran. Of course, it wasn’t an entirely pleasant trip. They were attacked a few times by monsters. But honestly, Sid was more scared of Isyuram after the fights then the monsters.

“Huhuhu, it’s no big deal. This small amount is....Kuaaaak!”

Every time a battle finished, Isyuram would turn pale and look like he was suffering from a seizure. After the seizure, he would just get up and cook the monster.

“Hmm hmm hmm, the meat of a troll is quite tough? But it’s good when I chew it. It’s juicy so it would taste a lot better once the meat softens.”

Any troll who heard that would be frightened. Anyway, the trip filled with terror and thrills ended after half a day. Sid sighed with relief after crossing Giran’s gates.

“Thank you. I was able to reach here safely thanks to ajusshi.”

“Hahaha, I wasn’t bored thanks to you.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“Well.....”

Isyuram scratched his head. Ever since starting the game, it was the first time he had been to a place with so many people. He had been buried in the mountains and now suddenly there was a busy city with lots of noise and people.

‘I can just wander around. But the problem is.....’

Money. When Isyuram received the character, his bag had 800 gold. But his funds was empty because he bought the 10 gold sake and went on a drinking spree.

He would drink a bottle whenever he ate a monster.

‘I suffer so much fighting the monsters so what fun will the game be if I can’t drink?’

Isyuram was finally able to drink during working hours so he went overboard. Isyuram explained the circumstances to Sid who sighed.

“I’m sorry. I don’t have any money right now.....”

“Ah, no. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not asking for money.”

“But.....”

Sid used vague language and lifted his head.

“Oh, then wouldn’t ajusshi have a ridiculously amount of japtém in your bags?”

He remembered that Isyuram would put the japtém from the monsters he killed in his bag with a grunt while they were travelling together. Then Isyuram nodded.

“Yes, then I can get money from selling those things?”

“Eh? Ajusshi, haven’t you conducted any deals as a merchant?”

“Well, there are circumstances.....”

“Hah, I really can’t understand you ajusshi. If you don’t like engaging in business then why are you a merchant? Well, in these circumstances I guess I can help you. Ajusshi can sell it directly, but if a merchant like me sells it then you will receive a lot more money.”

Sid had a conceited expression on his face as he spoke.

“Hehehe, my trading skill is actually quite high. I’d be able to get at least 30% more profit. Usually I would charge a fee but for ajusshi I’ll do it for free.”

“Oh, really? Then please.”

Isyuram’s expression brightened and he opened his bag. Sid became surprised and quickly shook his head.

“Don’t just hand your things directly over!”

“Eh? Why?”

“You really don’t know anything. I might run away with your items of course. Whenever conducting a deal, you should receive a contract first.”

Why did he have to explain this to a level 150 merchant? Isyuram really seemed to know nothing so Sid explained while drawing up the contract.

-Merchant’s Agreement.

<Contractor: Isyuram=Sid>

Sid will sell all the items received from Isyuram and return all the proceeds. The sale price has to be higher than the purchase price. There will be no sales fee for this service.

“Take a good look. Any time you give something to a merchant, you should always receive this contract. In some cases, the person will sell it for a lower purchase price just to raise his skill so you should always add the provision that it should be higher than the purchase price.

“How complicated.”

“You’ll soon get used to it. Now, please hand me the items.”

Sid smiled and began the trade. Sid was soon handed the items in the bag. Isyuram didn’t know how to buy or sell goods. Of course, most of what he carried was monsters’ leather. But Isyuram also handed over expensive trade goods and specialty products.

‘Where the hell did he get all these items? Coral silk, pearls.....aren’t these speciality items from the southern region? They’re worth 700 gold. No, I could receive 800 gold for them. What else will there be? Eh? T-this is.....!’

Sid’s face stiffened as he was handed something.

“Huh? What’s the matter?”

"Ah, it's nothing." You will sell all of these?"

"Yes, will it make money? I do not know....."

"Well, let's see? I won't know until I sell it. I'll check the market price for the moment and sell it at the right price. Let's meet back here after 1 hour."

Sid muttered before quickly running to the shops area. Then he halted in an alley and quickly opened the bag.

"C-clearly....is it that?"

Yes, the item that Isyuram gave was 'that.' The unicorn horns that Sid took out a loan to buy! And there were 4 instead of just one. To make matters worse, the purchase price was set at 850 gold when he investigated using his merchant skills. Currently the market price was 1,000 gold so that was 150 gold cheaper.

'Then the person who bought the unicorn horns before I arrived in the village was Isyuram ajusshi? If he doesn't know how to conduct business then he did he get the money to buy these?'

His heart had pounded as soon as he saw the unicorn horns. Anyway, Isyuram didn't know the market price for this item. Of course the contract said he had to sell it at a higher price than the purchase price, but wasn't 851 gold higher than 850? When considered Ark's quoted price of 1,000 gold, Sid would receive 149 gold. Then he could make a profit of 596 gold? But he had already written the agreement as the sales agent. Sid couldn't snatch the item in the middle. In addition, Sid had an credit note. He could use it in NPC run shops or auctions but it couldn't be changed to cash directly. And it wasn't possible to explain the situation to Isyuram. He would have to explain the market price value first..... What crazy guy would sell it for 851 gold when he knew that it was worth 1,000 gold?

'There is a way.'

In fact, Sid's chest pounded for this reason. He knew a method to snatch the unicorn horns for 851 gold. However, Isyuram had rescued him. And didn't it continue to accumulate on the way here? Even though money was at stake, to betray that person's trust.....

'No! Why wouldn't I?'

Sid wildly shook his head.

'Haven't I lived honestly so far? And all I ended up with was a debt of 3,600 gold. Just like Ark-nim said. Only fools get tricked in this world! Why can't I do as Ark-nim said? That's right, chances like this won't always come. I have to grasp the chance whenever possible!'

After being debt-stricken, Sid had become corrupted like Ark. Sid made up his mind and put the unicorn horns in a suitable size box before heading to a nearby store. He passed the box to the NPC of the merchants guild and said.

"I'm sorry, I have urgent reasons so there is no time to visit an auction. So can you put this item on the blind auction at the merchants guild? The condition is that it will be sold immediately when the asking price is met. And if possible, I don't want to reveal my name."

"It's not a difficult thing. I understand. You just have to pay a handling fee and it will be put up for auction under the name of the merchants guild."

"Thank you."

Sid paid the fee and immediately ran to the blind auction room. After standing in front of the auction place, the NPC finally bought the box and registered it 10 minutes later. If he needed to explain again, nothing in the blind auction could be touched. In other words, there was no way to figure out what was in the box. However, Sid had set the selling price as 3,404 gold, the price of 4 unicorn horns at 851 gold each. Of course there was no way it would sell. Sid visited the auction house and quickly spoke to the NPC.

"I'll buy this box!"

"Huh, this? You have no idea what the contents are and it is 3,404 gold....that is a tremendous gamble. I understand. Then can you pay immediately?"

"I have this credit note issued by the merchant's guild."

"Well, you have enough credit. I understand. It will be addressed immediately."

The salesroom NPC signed and deducted 3,404 gold from the 4,000 credit note. When Sid paid off the loan, he would only have to pay the 3,404 used at the auction and the interest. So he managed to obtain the unicorn horns without one penny. In fact, the person who came up with this method of deception was Ark. If he wanted to sell his items in a blind auction then he would use the services of the merchant's guild. Even without any money, all he had to do was pay the handling fee to the merchant's guild and he wouldn't suffer an actual loss.

‘What I learned then really worked!’

Sid carried the box joyfully. After selling the other items at the stores and visiting the merchants guild, he managed to obtain the 3,404 in gold. Even after paying the merchants guild 40 gold, he still received 556 gold. Now Sid would receive that money after passing the unicorn horns to Ark.

“Huk huk huk, I’ve finished. I got a lot more than I thought.”

After a while, Sid returned to where he promised to meet Isyuram. Then he handed over the money made from laundering the japtem.

“Oh, 4,580 gold! Those items were that expensive?”

“Yes, if you look at the receipts then you’ll see I got them for more than the market value.”

“Hey, I’m lucky I met you! I’ll treat you since I have money now. Where is the most expensive tavern?”

“No, that’s okay. I have somewhere to be right now.”

“Really? Unfortunately it can’t be helped. Now, this is a tip.”

Isyuram held out 100 gold. Ah, he really was scamming this ajusshi! Sid’s conscious was poked.....for a moment. He was already scammed once. What use was feeling bad? Anyway, the world was filled with stupid, gullible people. Sid kept in mind Ark’s words and took the gold from Isyuram.

‘Hehehe, I did it! I earned 656 gold!’

Sid felt no remorse once he got his hands on the money. Ark’s 2nd generation merchant was truly growing up in this heartless city of Giran. Hehehe, those useless things were worth so much money. I never would’ve known if not for Sid. I’m glad I met such a nice guy.”

Isyuram was unaware that he had been scammed by Sid and muttered this. Well, merchants in Giran should always be aware of other merchants eager to fill their purses. The future of Isyuram who didn’t know this world was still unknown.

Act 3: New Hobby

Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa!

Dust rose in the endlessly stretching wilderness. Crossing the wilderness at a tremendous speed was a lizard kicking up dust! It was Radun transformed into Radunma. Of course, riding on its back was Ark, Lariette and Buksil.

“How long do we have left?”

Ark checked the map and answered Lariette’s question.

“We’ve gone about 1/3rd of the way. We should arrive in a day.”

“That’s awesome. It took a fortnight when we were going to the Forest of Life.....”

“It’s all thanks to this guy.”

Ark patted Radun’s neck with a proud look. Lariette also sent an admiring look to Radun.

“But I never imagined that your snake could change. He can store items and also change into a mount. Dedric and Razak.....are also uncommon. I’ve seen a lot of people summon but this is the first time I’ve seen such pets. Where did you get them?”

“How many times do I have to say it? This body is not a normal summon. I’m a nobleman! And what do you think I am? A bonus gift that can be given away? Those remarks are species discrimination!”

Dedric lost his temper and pulled Lariette’s hair.

“Yayayaya, sorry, I’m sorry.”

“Shut up, humans are just.....”

Dedric shouted in a rough voice. However, Lariette just poke her fingers into Dedric’s stomach and laughed.

“I said I was sorry. This child, don’t be upset. I’ll be careful next time.”

“Ugh, ugh, ugh! W-where are you touching? Don’t, don’t touch there! They are sensitive areas. That tickles! Ugh, ugh!”

“Then tell me you’re not angry. Or do you want me to continue tickling you?”

“This is really.....ugh, ugh understood. I understand!”

“Hohoho, thank you.”

"Huk huk huk.....there is no respect for adults these days."

Dedric crumpled and gasped for a short time. But although he complained, his face seemed strangely satisfied. In fact, this was the part that surprised Ark lately. In the past, Lariette would hesitate whenever Dedric spoke meanly. However, Dedric had been training her in tactics for a fortnight. Now Lariette didn't even lift an eyebrow at Dedric's harsh tone. No, sometimes she dealt with his pet better than Ark. And he realised why Lariette dealt so well with his summons.

"My parents used to raise many pets at home. Ark-nim's summons are similar to those pets."

"Pets?"

"Yes, Dedric resembles a Chihuahua and Razak doesn't speak so he resembles a Siberian Husky. And Radun looks like a chameleon."

Luxurious names of animals worth millions of won emerged from her mouth. Ark never had a pet so it was incomprehensible to him why people would raise one. Of course owning a pet would be useful. He heard that it soothed loneliness and helped children talk. However, he couldn't comprehend spending a few million won on one and then wasting money buying pet food for it. Besides once they were tired of them, they would discard it like old handbags. Humans were indeed despicable. Oh, his thoughts were wandering.

At any rate, it wasn't a problem he would think too deeply about.

'Well, Lariette-nim isn't such a person.....'

Then, he sensed some movement as they passed a group of trees.

"Radun, stop."

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

Radun stopped moving and breathed harshly. Razak was transformed while Dedric was in his bat form, but Radun had to carry Ark, Lariette and Buksil and became completely exhausted.

"Dedric, take a look at that copse of trees. I think I see some Tuntun?"

Ark immediately commanded Dedric once they stopped. Dedric checked out the thicket and flew back in amazement.

"Whoa! That's amazing. How did you see them amongst all of that?"

"It's money."

Ark replied with a wide grin.

If they wound back the time a little bit.....a few days ago, Ark though he had finally complete the <Genius Alchemist's Laboratory> quest.

In wasn't necessary to say, but dealing with the sense of loss after all his expectations wasn't easy. But Ark had found a clue so he was positive he would solve it soon.

Magaro had written in his diary that the 'phenomenon happened a long time ago in the Netherworld.' Didn't that mean there would be more people who knew about what occurred in the laboratory? And Beseutyu was an expert in the history of the Netherworld. It must've been a great global event that happened all across the Netherworld. There had to be a record associated with it. So Ark was determined to hurry back to the valley village. His mind became really impatient to solve the quest. He couldn't afford to be distracted from completing the quest. However, this was different.

Of course Ark was impatient. He wanted to return to the village as quickly and avoid combat if possible. But if he saw a monster with a high probability of dropping the best items then it was different.

"Radun, let's take a break here. Buksil, wait here while Lariette will come with me."

Ark got off Radun and approached the thicket. While he called it a wilderness, it wasn't simple an empty plain. In some copses, there were many monsters that lived together. Ark discovered that monsters called Tuntun were gathered in those thickets.

Puswi! Puswi!

They were huge boar like monsters with sharp fangs and a blackened snout. The Tuntun wandered the wilderness in groups and possessed enormous attack and stamina.

"Huhuhu, I've found some good guys."

Ark mumbled as he confirmed the Tuntun and drooled. It was challenging to hunt the Tuntun but they gave a lot of experience. In addition, the fangs dropped by the Tuntun were items that the Baran clan liked a lot. It was possible to exchange 3~4 fans for the 'Umma's Sap,' which was equivalent to an advanced recovery item. They would be worth 20 gold in middle earth. The quality of the leather and meat was also better than other monsters.

“Discovering 6 Tuntun at the same time is lucky.”

“Are we using the same tactics we used last time?”

Lariette asked in a manner that showed she was accustomed to battle.

“Yes, me and Razak will enter from the front and strike first. Lariette-nim and Dedric help out from behind.”

“What buffs?”

“Well.....6 of them won’t be a burden so go with set of three offensive buffs.”

Ark thought for a moment and replied. Ark and Lariette had already become used to playing in a party. After training with Ark, Dedric and Razak, her skill proficiency and level had steadily risen. Lariette had changed professions at level 150 and now her Innocence Knight skills rose every time she levelled up. She was now level 180 and had achieved all the buffing skills previously shown by Alan. Ark had access to a large variety of buffs depending on the situation.

“You should organize your buffs and have a system for them.”

Ark suggested to Lariette.

An Innocence Knight was a similar profession to Holy Knight. The biggest advantage of a Holy Knight was that its buffs could be stacked up 3 times. The characteristics of the party would be determined by how they utilized the buffs. Stacking defense buffs would make a party strong in an endurance battle while stacking magic amplifiers would create a party strong in magic combat. An Innocence Knight was an all-rounder profession with almost all types of buffs. Then shouldn’t they be properly utilized?

Ark tested various kinds of buffs and the ones associated with them for research. He divided them into 3 types, offensive, defensive and average. After Ark’s command, Lariette immediately used the offensive type buffs.

“The great warrior’s soul.....Hero’s Spirit, Warrior’s Concentration, Storm Breathing!”

Hero’s Spirit increased damage by 10%! Warrior’s Concentration increased the probability of a critical hit by 20%! Meanwhile, Storm Breathing increased the attack speed of his weapon by 10%! When armed with those 3 buffs, his abilities quickly rose.

‘Well, I would rather use Dark Lamp but.....’

Ark looked down at the Dark Lamp hanging on his waist. It was an item that gave him the 40% dark attribute bonus during the day! At first he fell for its charm and used it recklessly. It consumed 10 magic ingredients but he didn’t think it was that important since he gathered a lot. But when continuously used, it was a surprisingly expensive burden. In addition, he became so familiar with Dark Lamp that battles become more difficult if he didn’t use it.

‘This is not good. The addiction is hard to break.’

Ark sensed the looming crisis. People who played the game would understand that it was like having good equipment and then suddenly changing to worse ones. Using the Dark Lamp was no different. It wasn’t an easy habit to break once he got a taste of it.

‘It’s difficult. Unlike food, magic ingredients can be sold in stores. Magic ingredients can be obtained in the fields but it is still wasting money.’

On the other hand, Lariette’s buffs raised his stats less but it was free. Besides, she had recovery magic so there was no reason to use the Dark Lamp.

“I’ll go first, Demonic Opening!”

Ark used demonic opening and immediately plunged into the copse of trees. That was the good point of Lariette. When he used Demonic Opening, it drained his health so he could only use it for a few minutes. Considering the damage dealt by the enemies, he could fight for approximately 5 minutes? However, it was different if there was a recovery user behind him.

Kiyaaaaak!

Ghostly wails emerged from Gwisal’s sword. The eerie aura caused the Tuntun to jump and become aggressive. At the same time, five of the Tuntun rushed towards him. The huge wild boars ran up to him and it seemed like he would be tackled by a mountain. However, they just looked like a flock of lucky pigs to Ark.

“Okay, I’ll eat well. Elemental sword, Fire attribute. Flash!

A flash of light penetrated the Tuntun and they were engulfed in flames. Ark was especially fond of the Warrior’s Concentration buff. Ark’s critical hit probability was originally very high. When he attacked three or four times, it was highly likely that there would be at least one critical hit. When the additional 20% was added, two or

three hits was likely to be a critical hit. The critical hits combined with the extra damage of Demonic Opening and Elemental sword was no joke.

.....Such skill combination was an basic example.

‘As expected, the effect of combining skills is greater with hero related professions.’

Ark realized that fact once again. The Saint Assassin Shambala, Holy Knight Alan, Dark Walker Ark..... So far, Ark had confirmed three hero professions. They were unable to wreck as much havoc if they grouped up with unrelated professions. The power of a hero related profession was only shown 100% when they partied with other hero professions. Of course that applied to other professions as well, but the synergy effect for hero professions was stronger as demonstrated in the Evil Silrion. And Lariette also had the Holy Knight hero profession!

‘I don’t know if it was intentionally created but the skills of the hero professions really complements each other. Indeed, the legendary 7 heroes grouped up during the Dark Century so it is natural....’

“Razak, stop the Tuntun’s attacking from behind!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Ark trusted his back to Razak and plunged into the group of Tuntun.

Kweeeeek, Kwaeeeek!

His sword swung all over the place and the pigs squealed as some of them collapsed. It was at a level where he could stand picking his nose and still win. However, Ark deliberately drove two Tuntun with half of their health left towards Lariette. A mentor could not overlook their pupil’s growth. He had time to give Lariette more hands on practice.

“Lariette-nim, take care of those two.”

“Yes, I understand!”

Lariette had experienced this many times and replied calmly. She grasped her shield and stood, with Dedric shout coinciding with the timing.

“Now, Shield Stroke!”

Tak, daeng kang-!

The correct timing! The fiercely rushing Tuntun was stuck by the shield and retreated. But the eyes of the training assistant still saw it as lacking. Dedric lifted her curtain of hair and yelled into her ears.

“You idiot! How many times do I have to say it? Your weight was tilted too far forward. Then you won’t be able to connect your later movements quickly enough!”

“Oh? Ouch!”

Dedric’s comment was indeed very keen. While Lariette’s weight was tilted too forward, the other Tuntun rushed in and crashed into her side.

“Look, what did I say? You must always anticipate the enemy’s movements and calculate your next movement based on that. Hey, what are you doing now? You really haven’t learnt! Hey, pig. Look at me! Come one~”

While Lariette was on the ground, Dedric provoked the Tuntun. Of course it fell for the taunt. When the Tuntun snorted and turned towards him, Dedric instantly ran away. In fact, Dedric was only level 140 while the Tuntun was level 200 so he couldn’t face it 1-on-1. But he didn’t forget to show off.

“Okay, I’ll take care of this guy for now. Can you handle the other one?”

“Yes, thank you. I can do it.”

Lariette got up and wiped off the dust. Ah, what a complete attitude change! It was a big development compared to when she would become embarrassed about the situation. Seems like.....she truly grew up strong. But honestly, it was still difficult to expect much from Lariette in a warrior’s role. It was not simply a matter of battle sense. In fact, Lariette received an enormous penalty when she changed to Innocence Knight. Even with getting 50% of her skill points, her stats were still fixed based on her previous profession. In other words, the points that she invested in wisdom and intelligence were still intact even after she became a knight. Of course, she needed strength, agility and stamina for close combat. Even after pouring all the points she got from levelling up into strength, agility and stamina, it still wasn’t enough strength for close combat. That’s why she fell down after the Tuntun just slightly rammed her. This problem wasn’t something that Ark could solve. She had no choice but to level quickly and raise the stat points.

‘Still, her force is pretty good compared to the first practice. But that’s a little....’

Ark smiled wryly as he stared at Lariette.

“Yap, yap, yap, yap!”

Lariette hopped around the Tuntun and brandished her sword. The problem was the movement. Taekwondo was the style Ark frequently used. He didn't know when but Lariette had somehow picked it up and her style of swinging the sword and evading attacks resembled Ark. Well, it was inevitably seeing as Ark was the only close combat warrior she had observed.....it was impossible for Ark's face not to become hot.

"Kyaaa, I did it!"

Lariette had finally defeated the Tuntun. However, she couldn't rejoice before Dedric who was being chased by the Tuntun shouted.

"Late! And slow! Huk huk huk, hurry up and deal with this guy!"

"Understood. Leave it to me! Yap, yap!"

Lariette couldn't recover her breathing before she was forced to swing her sword. At that time, Ark and Razak finished killing the rest of the Tuntun. And they leisurely sat around watching Lariette fight.

"What do you think Razak?" Hasn't it become a lot better from the first time you saw it?"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak folded his arms and nodded.

"Huhuhu, it's all thanks to hammering it into her body."

Then Lariette had transferred the monster off Dedric who puffed up and pretended to strut. And he threw sympathetic glances towards the last Tuntun.

"What a poor thing."

Kweeeek! Kweek-!

The Tuntun was bleeding heavily after the desperate struggle with Lariette. If Ark was his opponent then it would've already died multiple times. But unfortunately (?) Lariette's damage was low. Her swordsmanship was shabby. The Tuntun's level was also higher so she could only deal 50~100 damage with each attack. Thus she had to stab it a lot more than Ark before the Tuntun would collapse. Thanks to that, the Tuntun was hacked until it resembled mangled rag. Didn't it seem like the Tuntun was sending glances at Ark asking to liberate it? But Ark didn't see the

pitiful look in the Tuntun's eyes. Lariette skipped around and imitated Ark. Ark laughed involuntarily and murmured.

"Isn't it quite cute?"

Then Dedric opened his eyes and winced.

"M-master, your character is gloomy..... No, frankly it is too evil. Being happy when you're not tormenting us.....somehow it is not normal. Anyway, now I know for sure! Master has indeed changed.....

".....Say one more thing about my character and you're dead."

Ark declared sharply, making Dedric jump and mutter.

"What the? What normal person would look at the mangled dying Tuntun and find it cute?"

"This idiot! Who would consider the boar cute? I mean....."

"Kyaaa, I did it!"

Lariette's joyful shout was heard over the fierce scream.

'Certainly.....'

Ark wore an unpleasant smile. The Tuntun had completely stiffened while its blood was scattered all over the trees. And in the middle of that bloody scene was a woman rejoicing while holding a sword. If dark and dreary music was used then it would seem like the climax of a horror movie. Yet she still seemed pretty.....was his head slightly off?

"What are you talking about?"

Lariette rubbed the blood off her face and approached. Damn, it's a foul. Why does that still seem pretty?

"No big deal. Just discussing how Master's personality.....hah!"

Ark grabbed Dedric's snout and awkwardly laughed.

"No, we were talking about how Lariette's skills has become a lot better."

"Really? You see that?"

Lariette blushed at the praise. A little bit of Ark's soul was gone but he fiercely nodded.

"Yes, with a little more practice you can travel anywhere alone."

"Alone"

Loneliness shone in Lariette's eyes for a moment. Ark was puzzled by the abrupt change in her mood.

"What's wrong?"

"Ah, nothing. By the way.....perhaps Ark-nim....."

"Hey, thanks for the good work."

Lariette hesitated before opening her mouth.

"Wipe off the blood with this."

Buksil had been watching the battle from afar and quickly ran over with a towel. The pig clearly intended to flatter her.

"You were wonderful once again. In particular, Lariette's skills has become noticeably better. All I could do was admire it."

However, Ark ignored him and asked Lariette.

"What were you planning to say? You were wondering?"

"It's nothing. Will we continued resting her before going?"

"Huh? Ah, yes..... Radun needs to rest for a bit and I need to recover my mana....."

"Then I'll go with Buksil to collect some branches."

Lariette acted strange as she dragged Buksil away.

'Eh? Why all of a sudden? Did I do something wrong?"

Ark gazed after her and scratched his head. This wasn't the only time. A few days ago.....Lariette had also acted strange after exiting Magaro's laboratory. She would study Ark's face before suddenly changed the topic in the middle or running off to avoid him.

'I thought we've become friends so why is she suddenly acting like this?'

Ark's poor imagination could only think of one thing.

'Maybe I've acted too freely and made her uncomfortable? That might be it. We've been travelling together due to various circumstances but Lariette-nim has a boyfriend. I've tried to be careful but I might've done something unknowingly which made her uncomfortable.'

However, it was a misunderstanding. Of course, Ark had a crush on her but it was far from romantic. At first she was a person to yearn after and then she became a reliable colleague.....he never imagined anything other than that. And Ark thought that Alan was Lariette's boyfriend. Although Ark didn't like Alan, he wasn't going to act presumptuously. So Ark never said a word about Alan to Lariette. It would be impossible for Ark to say anything good about Alan. He didn't want to become a person who talked badly about her man in front of the woman. In addition, talking about her boyfriend could also lead to a misunderstanding.

'I don't know if she had misunderstood my instinctive behaviour. When Lariette-nim returns, it is better to tell her indirectly.'

"Then shall I pack the loot?"

Ark went over to the Tuntun holding the Butcher's Knife.

-You have succeeded in gathering the 'Tuntun's Leather.' However, the leather had been too damaged so it will not be a useful product.

'Of course.....'

Ark sighed as he looked at the tattered leather. Whenever he skinned the leather of monsters Lariette killed, it was highly likely that he would receive this message. The leather had been damaged because of too many injuries. However Ark didn't mind that much. Although he was pained that the leather couldn't be used anymore, skinning the leather still raised the experience for his skill. Ark would rather raise Leather Extraction then earn money because he wanted to make the Necromancer's Immortality pill.

"We're back."

After a while Lariette and Buksil returned. Ark had finished gathering all the leather and meat so he opened his mouth.

"That.....Lariette-nim, what you wanted to say earlier....."

“Oh god, it is already this time. I have to stop playing now.”

Lariette suddenly said. Then Buksil who had been building the campfire jumped and said.

“You’re leaving already?”

“Already? It is 3 a.m.”

“.....Okay. I’ll be waiting here.”

Ark once again missed the timing to talk and sighed before nodding. Then Lariette hesitated just before disconnecting.

“I’m really sorry.”

“Huh? For what?”

“Isn’t it inconvenient because of me? You’ve been teaching me and you have to wait for a long time whenever I disconnect.....”

“Aye, stop saying those things. I told you. You don’t have to worry.”

“But.....”

“I really don’t mind.”

Ark scratched his head as Lariette smiled and nodded.

“Thank you. It’s really lucky that I met Ark-nim. Then I’ll see you this afternoon.”

“Afternoon?”

“It is the weekend.”

“Ah, it’s already the weekend. I’ve lost track of time. Then I should go for a run this afternoon.”

“Hohoho, okay. I’ll see you as soon as possible.”

Lariette laughed and exited. After Lariette left, Buksil studied Ark’s face and jumped up.

“Oh Ark-nim, I’ll go and collect ingredients!”

“What? I have a lot saved so I don’t urgently need ingredients.”

“Then what will I do? I’m not helpful in a fight so I must do something to help out.”

“That attitude is quite desirable but.....”

“I will go straight away!”

Buksil ran into the forest without waiting for an answer. Then Dedric muttered with confusion.

“What’s up with that guy lately? He flatters you generously and trembles whenever you talk to him..... Master, did you beat him up again?”

“Am I a bully? Always beating people up?”

“Then why is he acting like that with you? It’s shameful to see.”

“Leave it alone. There’s no need to stop it.”

Ark laughed and shook his head since he knew the reason. A few days ago, Buksil had been full of complaints but now he was the model of a pig. The reason he changed was because of what appeared on the broadcast. This was why Buksil became strained. He was afraid that he had exposed his ulterior motive in Magaro’s Laboratory. In fact, Ark already knew about Buksil’s ulterior motive beforehand. He also guessed what Buksil tried to do. However, Buksil never dreamed that Ark already knew and thought that he had made the mistake of a lifetime.

‘That Ark bastard is quick to understand. Obviously he noticed something suspicious. What should I do? If he starts wondering about the situation then it will become complicated..... In the worst case situation, my ‘secret weapon’ might not even be used. That absolutely can’t happen!’

He had sacrificed his two brothers and his liver to accompany Ark. If Ark abandoned him then it would all be useless. Buksil felt the crisis so he was trying not to offend Ark. And he would avoid Ark as much as possible whenever they were left alone. Truly....it really was a painful effort. However, Buksil wasn’t only afraid of that.

“Then shall I begin?”

As soon as Ark was alone, he opened his bag and took out some colourful materials. Ark had started a new hobby. Yes, it was inconvenient that Lariette was an office worker so she would often disconnect. But Ark truly didn’t care. It

might've been annoying hunting in the same area for several hours but that wasn't a problem with his new hobby. His hobby was the Herbal Decoction that he learned from his Food Worshipper sub-profession!

"Huhuhu, this surprisingly has a lot of depth."

Ark started making herbal medicines. At first he considered it a skill to make potions. But he changed his mind after trying a few tests. The results of Herbal Decoction could be divided into three types. The first time Ark used Herbal Decoction, he created a sticky mucus. Since it wasn't possible to eat it, Ark checked the information window.

-You have successfully made a 'Salve' for the first time.

Salve: a herbal remedy which can treat the simplest of trauma. Depending on the type of salve used, you can treat sprains, bruises, arthritis, bleeding and other status effects.

<When putting the relevant salve on the part that is creating a status effect, you can recover from that abnormal state. However, it has no effect on Stun or other mental type afflictions>

"A treatment that can cure abnormal states!"

Ark's eyes popped out. Bruises and sprains decreased his movement and attack speed. In addition, states like arthritis usually lasted for a few hours and were a nuisance. Of course, using potions would heal those states but the price wasn't cheap and he couldn't always carry the potions around with him. So Ark just suffered through it.

"But it's another story if I can make it directly. And I can also sell it."

The salves had different effects depending on the colour. Red and yellow, white, black etc... respectively, it would work on bleeding, bruises and sprains. Unfortunately, he couldn't really utilize it yet. They also had ratings. Of course a treatment would have ratings. Ark's current salves could only cure lower ranked injuries. On the other hand, the monsters in the Netherworld inflicted advanced status effects.

"I have to raise the skill proficiency before I can create higher level salves."

Since then, Ark created salves every time there was a break. Then he managed to create another form of medicine. It was a herbal medicine which gave off a sweet, fragrant smell.

-You have successfully made a 'Tonic' for the first time.

Tonic: A herbal extract that was created after boiling the ingredients for a long time. A tonic is an effective supplement which can give long-term effects. However, you won't see much of an effect if you only take it for a short time. In order to see the effect properly, you must continue taking it over a long period of time.

<When you take the tonic steadily, your various stats will increase. However, you have to take it for a minimum of 30 days to 80 days in game time in order to see a proper effect. Taking the tonic will slowly raise your stats. There will be a penalty if you stop in the middle of taking the tonic>

"Huk, what the? Herbal medicines can also raise stats?"

Ark really felt like he had found a treasure. It was possible to make medicines that would raise stats? He never imagined it. In fact, there were alchemy recipes for drugs that would boost strength or stamina by 1~3. But such drugs were incredibly expensive because of the amount of magic ingredients required to create them. The expensive price was set at 100~500 gold. But he could create tonics using common ingredients!

"But it's a little vague."

Ark scratched his head and muttered. He wasn't able to create a useful tonic yet. Since his skill was still at the beginners level, Ark was only able to create tonics that raised his attack by +1. And taking it for a period of 30 days.....that was 10 days in reality. He had to produce it 30 times in 10 days in order to raise his damage by 1. In addition, he couldn't take overlapping tonics. He could only take one type at a time. But there was no need to be disappointed.

"After all, I can create it for a much lower price than alchemy potions. And once the skill increases then I will be able to make tonics that increase strength or agility. Then I can sell it in sets of 30 or 180 at the auction for a lucrative price."

Ark was already excited by the thought of selling the tonics. Of course, Ark registered all the tonic recipes before eating one. Eating it for 10 days would only increase his attack by 1, but it was still better than nothing. And the most problematic was the herbal tea.

You have successfully created a herbal tea for the first time.

Herbal Tea: One of the simplest and most convenient ways to create a herbal medicine. Unlike the tonic, the effect will immediately show after drinking the herbal tea. In addition, you can overlap and it is possible to drink several different types. However, the effect is only temporary and runs out quickly.

<The special effect and duration will depend on what you drink>

“What? The effect is similar to Survival Cooking? Then why would I bother to make a herbal tea?”

Ark asked with frustration. Ark’s survival cooking was at the master level. Once his skill rose, the effects of his dishes also rose. There were a few additional effects such as strength +20, magic resistance +20% and etc. It was to the extent that the battle would become easier once he ate some dishes. There was no reason to consume ingredients to create the low ranking herbal tea. However, Ark found a strange area in the explanation of the herbal tea.

“Eh? What is this? Why are my eyes drawn to the additional effects section?”

The side effects attached to the herbal tea was not raising strength, agility or damage. Thus his eyes stared at the description.

“What does this mean?”

Ark struggled for the moment while thinking. However, Ark knew from experience that variables in items existed. He couldn’t determine what it was until he drank it. Therefore Ark tried an experiment using livestock. The target was the pig he was raising....Buksil.

“How is it? Do you feel anything different?”

Ark asked after Buksil drank the herbal tea. However, Buksil just shook his head.

“Let’s see? I don’t feel like anything has changed.”

“Really? Strange? I understand. Tell me if you fell anything different.”

“Huh? What! Something strange? Did you feed me something suspicious?”

“No. It’s good for the body.”

Ark said with disappointment.

'Damn, what the? Then it was just a standard tea?'

But after a while the effect of the herbal tea was clear.

"Huh? What's this? What the? Why is it so easy to gather ingredients? Ohhhhh, and I can pick it this quickly.....! It doesn't seem like my hands!"

Buksil burst out as he quickly gathered ingredients. When Ark went to look, he saw Buksil's hands frantically move as it gathered ingredients. In addition, he continued digging without hesitation despite the high failure rate. With a flash, Ark realized what was happening.

'This is the effect attached to the herbal tea!'

Ark finally discovered the secret of the herbal tea and immediately created another one to feed to Buksil.

"Oh, what is this? All of a sudden the ingredients look really good? There are even delicacies hiding in the shade of the tree. Ugh, what? Why have my steps become so fast? The ingredients are also very easy to dig. I feel like I'm the master of Ingredient Foraging!"

Buksil ran around all over the place like Superman and collected ingredients. Thanks to him, Ark's supplies started to accumulate in his bag. The effects attached to the herbal teas was truly for beggars!

'The herbal teas allowed Buksil to gather all the ingredients in the vicinity. Okay, in the future Lariette will continue her training while I leave the ingredient foraging to Buksil.'

Ark decided to use the herbal teas after learning of its effects. However.....there was a side effect Ark never expected from this skill. He made Buksil drink herbal teas for the whole day. After drinking the herbal tea again, Buksil started to feel a tingling spread around his body.

"Eh? What is this? Ugh, itchy! Itchy! Ugh, I'm going crazy!"

Buksil screamed as he frantically clawed at his body. Ark examined Buksil's body with surprise and a message window appeared.

You have used the special nature of Food Worshipper to feel Buksil's 'pulse' and made a diagnosis.

Buksil's symptoms is due to poisoning from a drug overdose.

The herbal tea is weak but it is still a medicinal drug. If someone consumes too many varieties in a short period of time then they will suffer some symptoms until it is cleansed from their body. In the worst case scenario, it can permanently destroy a certain stat. Fortunately, Buksil's symptoms are not serious and he will recover in 8 hours.

'The effects are so severe it can damage a stat? Lucky I tested it out on Buksil.'

Ark really admired his foresight.

"Ah Ark-nim, what did you learn? My body.....Aigoo, why is it doing this?"

"Huh? Ah, it's no big deal. You should recover in approximately 8 hours?"

"Huk!8 hours? I have to stay in this state for 8 hours?"

Buksil turned pale at Ark's answer. Then he truly experienced hell for 8 hours. From then on. Buksil became even more afraid of Ark. Well, it's not like Ark made him abuse the teas after that. Buksil was sick in the heart.....but it didn't make a difference. Despite his illness, Buksil was still forced to gather ingredients. The important labour needed good management after all.

'Huhuhu, this is just another weapon to intimidate Buksil with.'

So Ark's wickedness increased even more.

Act 4: Buksil the House Pig?

"Character information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +400	
Fame	9,125 (+ 500)	Level	280

Profession		Dark Walker			
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer			
Health	4,360 (+150)	Mana	4,350		
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	563 (+28)		
Agility	723 (+55)	Stamina	823 (+20)		
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	842		
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	112		
Art of Communication	46	Affection	152 (+10)		
Resilience	305				
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138			
* Equipment item effects					
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.					
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%					
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10					
* <i><King></i> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20					
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3					
Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available					
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.					
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available					

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

Ark had gained 7 levels after defeating Magaro and he gained 4 more on the way back to the village, raising his level to 280.

'It is a lot better than hunting be myself.'

Ark nodded with a pleased face. He was quite satisfied with the current party. It wasn't necessary to explain, but Ark had been sceptical of hunting in parties. The reason was very simple. Just like most online games, New World provided additional experience when hunting in parties. Depending on the number of people in the group, it could range from 100% to 400%. At first glance it seemed like a bonus, but it was a problem once he considered that the experience had to be shared by the party members. Let's just say that a monster would give between 1,000-4,000 experience. When divided by 10 people, that was only 400 experience at most. Of course it was quicker and more sustainable than hunting alone.

That wasn't the only disadvantage of hunting with a party. The biggest problem wasn't when hunting but what happened after the monster was killed. Anyone with experience in online games knew that there were several types of item distribution. The most widely used approaches were the 'Turn and Roll' based methods. The

'Turn' method used rotated the members who would receive the item. And the 'Roll' method made players roll for the item if a magic or higher item dropped, with priority given to the related profession and the user who rolled the highest number would obtain the item. It was a system that seemed fair when looking at it. But the actual situation wasn't that fair. After hunting so many monsters and clearing dungeons, the items that monsters dropped weren't completely random. What he meant was.....for example, if he joined a party in order to clear the thieves in a mountain hideout. Thieves would mainly dropped weapons and armours for thieves.

So if a thief joined the party then they would end up monopolizing all the items. On the other hand, a different profession would only receive japtém. And they might even experience a loss since they had to buy potions and pay for repairs to their equipment. And those users would have no choice but to watch other people with the right profession take the items. A magic item dropping was better. If a rare item dropped and he was deprived of it, he would die from envy. The sound of rolling a 10 won coin in that situation was the most fearful thing Ark could imagine.

'In that sense, this party is truly ideal.'

Ark smiled warmly at Lariette and Buksil. Of course, in the beginning it was uncomfortable but now Lariette had eased into her role. And she accomplished her share alone as well. But was that all? Even though Buksil couldn't help in combat, he was valuable for gathering ingredients. However, Ark's favourite thing about this party was the substantial profit. While hunting in a party, Ark had to share the experience between the three of them. However, there was one loophole. The system to prevent low-levelled users from being power levelled. When there was a huge difference in levels in the party, most of the experience went to the highest levelled user. Currently Ark was approximately 100 levels higher than Lariette and Buksil. After they killed a monster, Ark got 50% of the experience. On the other hand, the party received an additional 100% experience. As a result, he received 50% of the 200% experience, which was a little bit more than when he hunted alone. * That contributed to why Ark gained 4 levels in three days. But was that all? They already agreed that Ark would get all the items obtained from hunting and harvesting. So items were more likely to drop in a party, Ark obtained more items than when he hunted alone.

'Huhuhu, it can't be better than this!'

Since the party depended on Ark, it could truly be called Ark's party.

"Ah, Ark-nim!"

While Ark was thinking, Lariette and Buksil ran from the forest with a panicked expression.

“What’s wrong?”

“M-monster, the red monster!”

Buksil shouted with a stricken face.

“Red Monster?”

Ark was puzzled until Lariette added.

“The Nakujuk we saw in the Abyss of Despair.”

“Nakujuk! In this area?”

“Yes, we saw more than twenty of them.”

Ark was confused by time Lariette finished speaking. The Nakujuk clan lived beyond the northern mountains. According to Beseutyu, the terrain of the northern mountains was so difficult that the Nakujuk hardly ever came to the south. The group of Nakujuk he met in Hagel Forest passed with the help of the Deurakan.

‘At that time, they came to hunt for the deceased. But after I disposed of Tamura, what reason would they have to come to the south? In addition, there is a hostile relationship between the Nakujuk and the Baran clan. So why are they roaming so close to the village? ‘What on earth is going on?’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted.

Grrrrrr.

He heard a threatening beast’s cry from behind him. Ark and Lariette jumped and instinctively grabbed their swords. At the same time, a bush shook and an eerie dog with a red mane appeared. Ark’s forehead wrinkled when he saw its appearance.

‘Eh? Haven’t I seen this monster in the village’s kennels....?’

The dog was the Hellhound that the Baran clan bred. The Hellhound Ark previously saw was black, so this one appeared red because it was tinged in blood. That wasn’t all. The faltering Hellhound was also carrying a boy with serious injuries on its back. Surprisingly the boy was....!

“B-Bona?”

Ark exclaimed once he belatedly figured out the boy’s identity. The boy flinched then he painfully lifted his head.

"Ah.....Ark hyung?"

"Yes, it's me. What's going on? How did you become like this?"

"Ah, Ark hyung.....help! The village.....Grandpa....."

"Village? Grandfather? What the? What do you mean? What happened to the village?"

"H-help. Please help.....!"

Bona grasped Ark's hands and mumbled before nodding off. At the same time, the Hellhound ran out of energy and collapsed. Ark approached quickly and examined Bona. Fortunately, the Hellhound and Bona were only unconscious because of their injuries.

"Ark-nim, what is going on....?"

Lariette asked in confusion. But Ark also didn't know. The Nakujuk were also wondering around.....clearly something strange had happened. He shouldn't act recklessly before finding out the reasons. Ark organized his thoughts for a moment before saying.

"Hurry and clean up. We have to avoid them and find a safe place."

-'Shadow' has been applied and 'Stealth' has been maintained.

'Those bastards.....'

Ark hid behind a rock and looked down at the valley village.

Rattle, rattle.

The people in shackles were moving rocks or wood while gasping. All around them were supervisors monitoring them with whips. The scene happening in the village seemed like a medieval movie. The Baran clan were reduced to slavery while the Nakujuk were the supervisors.

"That guy, what are you doing?"

"Can you move faster?"

The Nakujuk shouted and used their whips. Then, a big bull carrying a big rock passed out. The bull was a monster called Bolkanasu trained to pull carts in the village. Not only the Baran clan members, but the monsters they trained were also being abused. When the Bolkanasu fell down, the Nakujuk ran towards it.

“How dare you fall down! Take this!”

“It is impossible. Hold on, please let it rest for a moment!”

A middle aged trainer appeared and fell to the ground begging. However, the Nakujuk just kicked him away and continue whipping the Bolkanasu. Then the trainer embraced the Bolkanasu.

“What? How dare this slave resist?.....Okay, I'll let you taste it once!”

“Ugh, aaaaak, p-please....!”

The trainer's back immediately became bloody as the whip tore it open. But the Nakujuk seemed encouraged by the screams and only whipped him harder, dealing deeper wounds. Just as the trainer reached a critical condition.

“Stop!”

A sharp voice was suddenly heard. Ark reflexively turned his head and flinched. The person approaching the Nakujuk was surprisingly Jewel.

‘It's just like Bona said. But how on earth did those guys.....?’

Ark swallowed his saliva and replayed a memory. About 30 minutes ago, Ark had avoided the Nakujuk in the forest and hid with Bona inside a small cave. In fact, Ark could actually handle 20 Nakujuk by himself. But after checking Bona's injuries, he instinctively sensed that the situation was more complex than he thought. Ark's judgment was correct. After Lariette used recovery magic for a while, Bona delivered some shocking words. The incident occurred a week ago which was two days in reality. The peaceful village was attacked by 400 Nakujuk. They occupied the village in an instant and drove the Baran clan to slavery.

Ark still couldn't understand anything at this point. First of all, Beseutyu told him that the Nakujuk lived beyond the northern mountains. And the terrain was so steep and complicated that the Nakujuk couldn't move through it. Although a small group could penetrate using the Draken, it was impossible to move a few hundred troops. That's why the Nakujuk had never a threat to the Baran clan so far. But how did 400 troops suddenly climb over the northern mountains? Bona just shook his head.

"I don't know. But Grandpa said that it obviously had something to do with them."

"Them?"

"The foreigners that passed into the Netherworld along with Ark hyung."

Ark became even more confused. The foreigners that came to the Netherworld with Ark. In other words, Jewel's group dedicated to killing Ark. Then Jewel worked with the Nakujuk to attack the village? The Nakujuk was a species of monster in the Netherworld but it still had a chaotic alignment. But why did they ally with the monsters? How was that possible? And how did they manage to transport hundreds of Nakujuk across the northern mountains? There were numerous questions that popped into his head. But he didn't know any of the answers. All he knew was that it was a complicated and twisted situation.

'For users to ally with monsters in order to invade a NPC village.....'

He never imagined that such a thing was possible. However, it wasn't that impossible after working through it step by step. Of course, it would be absolutely impossible in middle earth. If a user did that then it would be impossible for the royal families of the Schudenberg, Sinius and Bristania kingdoms to just watch. The knights of the kingdom would be dispatched to smash them. But this was the Netherworld. While the Nakujuk had established a kingdom in the north, the south was filled with different communities and a major NPC force to protect the town didn't exist.

'Even so.....'

Ark thought for a moment before moving onto the second question. It was clear that Jewel's group allied with the Nakujuk to invade the village. The problem was why? He couldn't think of a reason for why they would do that.

'Even if Jewel noticed that Beseutyu tricked them, it's still weird that they allied with the Nakujuk to attack the village. They came to the Netherworld in order to catch me. And they already know that I've left the village so why would they want to occupy it? And what reason would the Nakujuk have to occupy this small village?'

Ark considered all the possibilities. He came to the conclusion that there must be some benefit for Jewel and the Nakujuk. Let's consider Jewel's group first. Occupying a village had clear benefits. However, they would have to share the profits with the Nakujuk. In addition, this world relied on bartering so there was no money. All they could obtain was at most japtem. Would they provoke a hostile relationship with the Baran clan who lived in the south just for some japtem? There must be something more than profit. The same also applied to the

Nakujuk. Although they had taken over the town, they clearly couldn't go back and forth between the northern mountains yet. More than 400 troops would've come over if that was possible. It also wasn't easy to plunder the loot and then send it back home. There was no reason for them to travel over the northern mountains just to occupy the village.

"They took control of the town and are making the monsters and uncles collect materials to create something. But Grandpa didn't know what it was either."

Bona also couldn't answer this part.

'Create something.... That must be their other purpose.'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted. Bona shed tears and suddenly spoke.

"Ark hyung, please help us. If the villagers are harassed by the Nakujuk, they will die. They managed to escape with me but then Grandpa and Guran were recaptured....."

After the village was attacked, there were a lot of Baran survivors. The reason was simple. Jewel's group was just too strong. And there were also 400 Nakujuk combatants. With only 200 residents, the villagers couldn't afford to fight back. In addition, they used the children as hostages as soon as they attacked. So the villagers didn't dare resist and became prisoners. Guran and Beseutyu were trainers and they managed to use a Hellhound to escape with Bona. They planned to notify the other villages and ask for help. However, they were caught by the Nakujuk and only Bona barely escaped.

"Um....."

Ark saw the bruises on Bona's body and was speechless. Thanks to Lariette's healing, Bona had recovered but there were still injuries on his body. He had received those wounds after being chased by the Nakujuk. He didn't even know what happened to the village after it had been occupied. After thinking about that situation, something rose in Ark's heart.

"How dare they do such things to a child.....son of a bitch!"

"Huh?"

Clack clack clack clack?

Dedric and Razak sent Ark a strange look.

“What? Why are looking at me like that?”

“No.....Master talking like that.....”

“What about it?”

“No, I was suddenly reminded of the past.”

Dedric said while shrugging. After all, Dedric was actually younger than Bona when he transformed into a boy. When the person who kept on beating Dedric up said those kind of words, who wouldn't find it strange? Bona's wounds were pretty average compared to how Dedric looked after Ark was finished with him. But was that all? Didn't he also beat up a user like Buksil and exploit him? However, Ark was strict to some people while generous with others. He believed his actions to his pets were 'raising them with love' while Buksil was 'give or take.'

“Those words.....”

“Ah, I got it. I understand. I know Master is a 'good' person. We're 'really happy' that we met such a good Master.”

Dedric insinuated sarcastically.

“This child really.....!”

“What? Do you intend to break me again? Fine, expose your true character. Buksil, you say something too.”

When he saw Ark's furious expression, Dedric quickly ran away and Ark chased him.

“Ark-nim and Dedric should control yourselves. This isn't the time to be playing around!”

Ark and Dedric stopped moving at Buksil's shout.

“Hey, pig...?”

Dedric made a stupid expression and blinked several times. But Buksil just applied salve onto Bona's wounds without turning his head and said.

“Bastards, to a child.....”

Buksil's serious attitude felt out of place. Ark's eyes asked 'why is he acting like this? Did he eat something bad?' A

nd Dedric replied silently 'How should I know? Stupid Master!'

So what was Ark's response?

'Stupid Master? Do you believe I can't do anything to you? You really want to die?'

He silently told Dedric.....

"Buksil-nim is right. We can't play around."

When Lariette sighed, the quarrelling Ark and Dedric became embarrassed.

"Ark-nim, what do we do now?"

"Let's see."

Ark sighed and shook his head. His thoughts had been wondering thanks to his conversation with Dedric but this situation was serious. A major problem was that if he didn't save Beseutyu, how would he discover any clues to complete the <Study the Mirage> quest?

'Somehow I have to settle this problem.....'

"Lariette-nim should stay here with Buksil to continue treating Bona. I'll take a quick look at the village. We'll discuss any further problems after that. Dedric, you stay here and contact me if anything happens."

So Ark headed to the village from the cave.

'A user is better than NPCs.'

Ark hid behind the rock and laughed as Jewel approached the Nakujuk. Although they were enemies with Ark, at least Jewel's group had a conscience. But Ark miscalculated. Jewel pulled the trainer's face close and said.

"You shouldn't excessively injure the valuable labour force. Let's see, you said you both needed a break?"

"Yes, Yes. Please..... The Bolkanasu.....is at its limit.... Even a little bit is good...."

"Okay, it can't be helped. The rest to your heart's content."

"Huh? R-really?"

“Of course. If you can.”

“Huh? What are you saying.....?”

“Hey, bring his child here.”

The Nakujuk brought a young boy in shackles. Jewel kicked the boy and waited.

“Huk, w-what is this.....?”

“Hahaha, didn’t I tell you? You can rest for one or even two days if you want. Instead, your son will take your spots.”

“Ack, Father!”

“S-stop! Please don’t. I’m going to work. So please stop....!”

The trainer screamed and grabbed Jewel’s pants, who then spat on him and muttered.

“Bah, how dare you ask for a break? If you act like this again then I won’t leave you son alone. Take his son away.”

“Huh? Yes!”

Even the Nakujuk was amazed at Jewel’s viciousness. However the other Hermes guild members just smirked and gave a thumbs up to Jewel.

“Oh Jewel, you really were a villain this time.”

“Huhuhu, I was still restraining myself.”

Ark was outraged while watching.

“A S (Sadist)? Did those guys open their eyes and became a S?”

Ark was not a messenger of justice. Ark was more irritated then sick whenever he saw news about people dying in terrorist attacks. But.....but this wasn’t right. Even if the people were NPCs, how could they behave like that with no hesitation? And to even laugh as the father and son were separated.....

He wanted to run down there and punch them in the jaws. But the opponents were Jewel’s group and the 400 Nakujuk. In fact, the 400 Nakujuk weren’t a big problem. Ark had already killed more than 600 Nakujuk in the Abyss of Despair. Of course he couldn’t handle 400 at the same times, but if he planned it properly then

he could kill 400 or 600 Nakujuk. But the problem was the combined power of the players and monsters coalition. It was impossible to use such plans against a user.

‘Unbelievable. It’ll be better if Jewel’s group wasn’t in the village.....’

Ark was worried until he suddenly tilted his head to one side.

‘Wait, what on earth is Jewel’s purpose? Jewel and the Nakujuk wouldn’t be making them labour for no reason. So there must be some purpose....but what is it? Where are they moving stone and timber to? I suppose I’ll have to check it out.’

Ark walked along the outskirts of the village using ‘Shadow.’ After moving to the other side, he managed to see the problematic structure. It was a tower that was already 50% completed.

‘Eh? I’ve seen that structure somewhere before....?’

Ark dug through his memories because there was a sudden flash. As expected, it was the tower in his memory. The tower seen at the Magic Institute in large cities on middle earth! Of course, it was a much smaller scale but the shape was approximately the same. An oddly shaped sphere was rotating with a hazy light around it at the top of the tower. Ark realised Jewel’s and the Nakujuk’s plot as soon as he saw the sphere.

‘That is the reception tower used for letter movement!’

That’s right. Jewel’s group was constructing a tower to receive letter movement. Letter movement was a spatial movement technique that the Magic Institute was still studying. It wasn’t something that users like Jewel’s group could make. Since their civilization was delayed, the Nakujuk wouldn’t have such knowledge either. So how the hell could they build a tower for letter movement? It was incomprehensible. But Ark could understand the reason for building it.

‘Oh my god, the Nakujuk are planning to conquer the Netherworld using the valley village as a base!’

Yes, that was the only reason he could think of. There was probably another reception tower in the Nakujuk’s kingdom. With the two reception towers, they wouldn’t have to march their troops through the northern mountains to reach the south. The Nakujuk could freely come to the south whenever they wanted. After occupying the valley village, they would spread through the south and the Baran clan wouldn’t be able to resist.

‘This problem might be worse than I thought.’

Ark's face became serious. Jewel would never make the decision to ally with the Nakujuk alone. Raiden the leader of the Hermes Alliance would definitely be involved. It was a high possibility that they made a contract with the Nakujuk to conquer the Netherworld together. It would be impossible in middle-earth, but is such a thing was possible.....?

'At present, there is no benefit to occupying a town in the Netherworld. But the Netherworld and middle earth is not completely disconnected. Although it would take some time, many users could enter with the passage I used.'

So what if the Hermes Alliance decided to enter the Netherworld and conquer some towns? Clearly the Hermes Alliance would undergo an incredible growth in a short amount of time.

'And all that power would be concentrated in Silvana.'

Ark knew about Nagaran's current state through JusticeMan. The 5 alliances each occupying a castle had similar forces and held each other in check. If one of the alliances tried to grab more power than the other four alliances would ally together to stop them. But it was a different story if one alliance could hide the growth of its forces from the others. That was Raiden's target. Hide in the Netherworld and conceal his strength. After raising it by a certain amount, return to Silvana and concentrate on conquering the rest of Nagaran. If the Hermes Alliance managed to take control of the Netherworld then that wouldn't be a dream anymore. And the Hermes guild was his enemy so it was like a death sentence to Ark.

'Oh my god, I wouldn't be able to handle it alone!'

Ark's face turned dark. If the Hermes guild had that kind of power then regaining Silvana was impossible for Ark. He would have to discard the secret tunnel in the dungeon and the two sets of books from the trading post. But was that all? The Hermes Alliance would spread throughout New World. They would have an influence in middle earth as well as the Netherworld. Ark would have no place to hide.

'It's the end if Jewel and the Nakujuk manage to conquer the Netherworld. I have to stop it somehow!'

But the opponent was the Hermes Alliance and the Nakujuk. The Hermes Alliance couldn't leave Silvana empty so they couldn't concentrate their energies on the Netherworld. But the Nakujuk had been aiming for the southern region for hundreds of years so they would use all their power. The Nakujuk were soldiers of a kingdom so they weren't simple monsters. Didn't that mean he would have to fight against a kingdom in the end?

'This.....I can't stop it..... I'm screwed.....'

Ark was feeling pessimistic. At that time, Bona's words came to his head.

'Wait? Didn't Bona tell me Beseutyu wanted to escape to ask for help from the other Baran clans? That's right, the Baran would definitely want to stop the Nakujuk from conquering the Netherworld. Although they are scattered, if the Baran knows about the situation then they might join forces to fight them.'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted. He suddenly heard Dedric's desperate voice in his ear.

"M-master..... Nakujuk have detected the group.....hurry..... quickly....."

Since they were quite far apart, the communication wasn't that great. However, he was able to understand the vague information. The Nakujuk chasing after Bona had probably discovered them. Ark felt his heart fall.

"Dammit. If Bona asks the other villages for help then it will be a big problem. Of course the Nakujuk wouldn't easily give up on pursuing Bona. If I'd known in advance then I would've never left them....."

If Bona was captured by the Nakujuk then his one strand of hope would disappear. Ark hastily ran out of the village and shouted to Radun.

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark frantically rode Radun. Then he finally reached the forest near the hideout.

"Master.....this way..... Those guys are around.....be careful."

Dedric's voice was heard in the opposite direction of the hideout.

'Fortunately they're still not caught!'

Ark got off Radun, used 'Shadow' and followed the voice. He soon discovered Lariette and Bona hiding in some bushes on top of a hill.

"You're safe."

"Yes, but Buksil-nim is....."

"Buksil?"

Ark noticed that Buksil wasn't there. Then Lariette pointed down the hill with a dark look. Ark followed the finger with his eyes and frowned.

"That bastard.....!"

10 Nakujuk and one user were gathered in a group at the bottom of the hill. It was Duke! Duke had used his various tracking skills to supervise the search. And lying next to Duke was Buksil with half of his health already gone. His beaten face was swollen and bruised.

"What happened?"

"We were hiding in a cave when the Nakujuk suddenly appeared. Fortunately Dedric and I managed to stop the Nakujuk's attacks and ran away. But then that guy called Duke suddenly appeared. Dedric and I was no match for his strength..... We were almost caught when Buksil who had been watching suddenly blocked him and allowed us to escape. But we would've been surrounded if we ran off so we just hid here."

Lariette explained. Ark had seen dozens of Nakujuk in the forest when coming here and Lariette didn't have a stealth skill like him.

'But even so....'

It was surprising that Buksil threw his body to save them.

"This bastard, why won't you hurry up and talk?"

Duke was kicking Buksil at the bottom of the hill. Buksil screamed like a child and rolled around on the ground.

"D-damn.....I already told you that Lariette-nim and Bona have left the forest!"

"Bah, don't make me laugh. The forest is already surrounded. They wouldn't have been able to leave without getting captured. Obviously they're hiding somewhere around here. Foolish bastard."

Duke pulled out a scroll and showed it to him. Buksil turned pale with terror after seeing the scroll.

The [Track] scroll.....that's right. It was a scroll that could determine the relative position of the target within a 1km distance.

"Now do you understand? They will be caught anyway. But I don't want to know about a girl and a child. Do you think I've forgotten? You.....were with that Ark bastard before!"

"Ah, Ark-nim isn't here!"

"I know that. I've already tried to use the [Track] scroll on Ark. But how can it find here when the Netherworld is so big? Tell me, where is that bastard Ark hiding?"

"D-dunno, I don't know!"

"Do you really want to die?"

Duke raised his hand and a Nakujuk immediately lifted its sword. But he changed his mind with a light laugh and said.

"Okay, then let's make a deal. In fact, killing you won't do me any good. I'll let you live if you tell me where Ark is. There is no point in being loyal to Ark. That guy is a despicable and vicious bastard....."

"I know, I know! I know a 100 times better than you do. Ark is a gruelling task master and a really stingy man. He is a wicked person who uses violence after a meal and secretly poisons you. I have no intention of protecting such a person!"

'T-that bastard is seriously backstabbing me.....!'

Ark's face warped as Buksil's words rang through the forest. But Duke was delighted and nodded.

"Oh, I understand. Then have you agreed to the deal?"

"But, but....."

Buksil suddenly tackled Duke and punched him.

"Aish, he's not vicious like you guys! He's not unscrupulous enough to whip a child! Take this....you damn bastard!"

"T-this bastard...!"

Buksil had used to element of surprise to land a hit on Duke. But the fists of a merchant only dealt 1% damage..... When Duke kicked him, Buksil instantly rolled across the ground. The normal Buksil would've moaned and acted like he was dying. However, today Buksil was different. Instead of crying, he just got back up and rushed towards Duke.

'Son of a bitch...!'

Ark clenched his teeth together tightly. He looked like a messy pig covered in tears and not but that didn't matter. Ark was just grateful that Duke's attention was focused on him.

But.....but.....why was his anger rising? Why? He had no loyalty towards the pig.....

"Aish, kill you! I'm going to kill you. You son of a bitch!"

"Are you crazy? Okay, if you really want to....."

Duke cursed and got out his bow.

Then an arrow flew towards Buksil's neck!

Jjeok-!

Duke's jaw went back 90 degrees. Duke received massive damage and fell down. A man wearing a thick cloak stood in front of Buksil. Ark! Yes, Ark had jumped down the hill and kicked Duke's chin.

"You.....this bastard.....!"

He glared at Ark. Ark smirked and murmured.

"Hey, Duke. Who told you to hit this guy?"

"Ah, Ark-nim!"

Buksil looked at Ark with tearful eyes.

But his joyful expression disappeared at Ark's next words.

"This guy might look like this.....but he's not a wild boar."

"Eh? Wild boar?"

"This guy is a house pig that I've been raising!"

'What is this? I don't understand.....was I considered a house pig that could be eaten at any time?'

Buksil became seriously worried about his identity.

[Translator's: The raws were missing the stats for resilience and affection so I just used their previous values but they've probably increased.]

Act 5: Baran Family Rescue Mission

"Ku, kukukuku."

Duke raised his body and giggled slowly. He alternated looking between Ark and Buksil.

"Hahaha Ark, you're softer than I thought. Are you willing to die for a colleague?"

"What are you talking about? He's a house pig."

Ark blushed and declared sharply.

"Anyway you just did something stupid. I'll make you regret it."

'Dammit.....you don't need to say it, I'm already feeling regret.'

Ark inwardly sighed. Was he crazy? Plunging into enemy lines just to save a pig? By now, 50 Nakujuk had appeared..... The odds weren't in Ark's favour. It wasn't something he would normally do when sane. But it had already happened. Although he acted unknowingly, Ark wasn't the type to give up once a battle had begun.

'I just have to get away from the enemy's formation.....'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Everyone attack!"

The fifty Nakujuk rushed in unison at Duke's command. Thanks to their momentum, Ark would be pierced by fifty swords!

"Slime's Time, NO1!"

Tu tu tu tung-!

Ark's body was wrapped in a yellow slime and the swords bounced off it. He couldn't attack but he was invulnerable to all physical attack skills for 10 minutes. In fact, the Myutal were a race that couldn't develop magic. That's why he never saw any magicians in the Baran clan or among the Nakujuk at the Abyss of Despair. In other words, Ark could use Slime's Time if Jewel wasn't present.

'Okay, I can earn some time with this.'

But that was Ark's mistake.

"Bah, using that skill again.....but that's not enough!"

Duke ran and continuously shot arrows. At the same time, flames appeared where it hit Ark's body.

-You have been damaged by the exploding arrow. 450 damage!

<Your magic resistance has fallen by 100% thanks to your state and you will receive 'Burn' damage>

'Ah, magic arrows!'

He forgot that Duke could use magic arrows. Magic arrows were granted a magic attribute! Thanks to 'Slime's Time,' he received 100% of the damage. But there was even more. When using Slime's Time, Ark's body was covered in a viscous liquid. So his sword became soft and he inflicted 0 damage. In that situation Ark couldn't even fight back.

"Kukukuku, did you think I would fall for this again?"

Duke sensed this and enthusiastically shot his arrows. Flames were rising everywhere and his health was decreasing.

'Dammit, I knew I shouldn't have done it. I accomplished nothing and only made the situation more complicated.'

Ark shot Buksil an angry look. Why did he have to suffer so much because of this guy? But there was no way to run once he took action. Ark grabbed Buksil by his collar and shouted.

"Why are you just standing here? Let's go!"

"Huh? Ah, yes!"

Buksil was surprised and ran after Ark.

“Do they think I will miss?”

Duke chased after them and shot his magic arrows, engulfing them in flames.

‘With these odds, I’m unlikely to be able to get away!’

Ark rolled on the floor with Buksil and clenched his teeth. Duke’s profession was a ranger. The ranger’s default movement speed was faster compared to other professions and he could also track their trail if the path split. Was that all? His ability to detect stealth was the worst for rogue type characters.

‘But there is a way!’

Ark grabbed Buksil and pushed through the Nakujuk with Dark Dance.

“Kill them!”

The Nakujuk swung their swords as Ark twisted among them. But Ark was invincible against physical attacks when covered with slime! Rather, he made it difficult for Duke by leaping between the Nakujuk.

“What the? T-these morons, get out of the way!”

Ark moved among the fifty Nakujuk who were hit by some of the flying arrows instead. But the magic arrows even triggered splash damage. The Nakujuk were caught in an explosion. The Nakujuk belatedly noticed this too late and scattered all over the place. But Ark didn’t willingly let them get away. He clung onto the Nakujuk like a leech.

“You rat bastard. But time is running out. You won’t stand a chance!”

‘It definitely will be tough to win this.’

Ark had to use the Nakujuk as shields until time ran out. Once Slime’s Time ended, the Nakujuk would be able to hit him with their swords. He would definitely not be able to avoid all those swords. However, Duke was forgetting one thing. If Duke was acting more calmly then he would’ve noticed straight away.....

Even though he was cornered, Ark’s pets who always followed him wasn’t there and neither was Lariette.

‘Slime’s Time is almost finished. Are they almost done?’

Ark's stomach went tight as he determined the time remaining on his skill. There was only 10 seconds left when Dedric's voice flowed into his ears.

"Master.....ready.....it's finished."

At the same time, the slime disappeared from Ark's body. Fire burned in Duke's eyes.

"His skill has ended. Attack!"

"Ooh oh oh oh!"

As expected, the Nakujuk ran up and stabbed their swords. Ark used Riposte to push back the group of Nakujuk. The Nakujuk collided with their colleagues and fell down in a huge mass. Ark quickly stepped past the Nakujuk and ran towards the narrow gap between the hills.

"Kukuku, what a foolish fellow. You should've run away to some other place.....After him!"

The Nakujuk followed closely behind Ark and swung their swords. Ark confirmed that all fifty of the Nakujuk were coming and took out the Saw Blade. After converting it into a whip, he twisted it around them and gathered the group together. Ark held the Saw Blade and shouted towards the top of the hill.

"Now Radun!"

It was at that time. A giant lizard jumped out from the hill. It was Radun transformed into Radunma. Radun blocked the Nakujuk from the entrance of the hills, making them flinch.

"Huk, what, what the?"

"Radun, just push against them!"

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun let out a sharp cry and pressed his body against the Nakujuk. Thanks to the narrow gap between the hills, the Nakujuk was pushed back.

"Damn! What, this lizard is?"

"Kill them, tear them apart!"

"Huk, wait a minute.....look behind you!"

The Nakujuk tried swinging their swords. Then one of the Nakujuk saw something behind it and screamed. Radun had pushed the Nakujuk inside a hill....there was a round circular shape that looked like a mirror. Then all the Nakujuk disappeared, making it seem like a lie.

“What, what the? What happened? Eh eh?

While being pushed by Radun, the Nakujuk had been swallowed by that circular space.

‘Success!’

A satisfied smile spread on Ark’s face while he watched from the hilltop. Yes, this was the strategy that Ark thought of. He had jumped off the hill to save Buksil, but before that Ark entrusted Lariette with one item. She used the ‘Dimensional Movement Powder’ to draw a circle on the hill to middle earth while Ark bought some time. He didn’t have to explain the reason. The Nakujuk entered the hill and was transferred to middle earth. Fortunately, only 500 grams of the precious powder was used. While the Nakujuk were being swallowed by the dimensional gate, Duke came running.

“Grab that bastard Ark....eh? Where did everyone go?”

Duke looked around with stunned eyes. All the Nakujuk gathered in that narrow space had disappeared so of course he was puzzled. Ark just grinned from above and said.

“They were sent to a good place. They’ll probably receive a warm reception.”

“You, you.....what the hell did you do?”

“I told you. They were sent to a good place. But there is no space for you.”

“You bastard....!”

Duke lifted his bow. But Ark was many times faster. Ark pushed off a tree branch as he jumped down and his heels landed on Duke’s head. It was like a 10 metre thunderbolt dropping down. Duke’s face was smashed into the ground and he became stunned.

“Now, shall we fight fair and square? Of course, I’ll be fighting fairly.”

Lariette, Razak and Dedric stood around them smiling. Thus Duke’s fate was decided.

"Razak, prevent that guy from running away!"

Clack clack clack clack, daeng kang!

Razak pushed Duke back using his sword, while Duke couldn't grasp the situation.

"Hahaha, didn't you hit me with the exploding arrows before? It might've only hit this body for 3 seconds, but I stored a grudge for 300 years. Take this, Dark Dash!"

Dedric chattered next and rushed into him.

"Ugh, those fellows.....!"

Duke remained baffled and fired arrows all over the place. However, nobody in Ark's group was idiot enough to be caught by one of the blindly fired arrows.

No, there was one.

"Ugh!"

Buksil screamed as an arrow hit his bulging stomach. His health was already low and he fell into a critical condition. It really was ridiculous.

"You idiot, don't stay too close. Lariette-nim, the 3 piece set of offensive buffs please!"

"Yes, the great warrior's soul.....Hero's Spirit, Warrior's Concentration, Storm Breathing!"

His damage, attacks speed and critical hits rose thanks to the buffs. However, there was no need for him to receive the buffs.

'What the? Is this guy really Duke?'

Duke's health dropped to 30% before he understood the situation. Even though the situation was bad, Duke was a pioneer and regrouped before starting a counterattack. When they fought in the Evil Silrion, every shot by Duke felt like a special move. But now they were too weak. Of course, it wasn't like Duke weakened. If that was the case.....

'Have I become that much stronger in the Netherworld? Enough to feel like a pioneer is nothing?'

In fact, it was the inevitable result. Duke had been engaged in the sieges at Silvana. And the biggest drawback of the siege was the penalties when dying and that no experience was received from defeated users. In the long run it wasn't possible for

him to grow that much and the same thing happened in the Netherworld. It wasn't possible to hunt since they were chasing Ark. On the other hand, Ark had hunted in the ice cave and the Abyss of Despair after coming to the Netherworld. His level was already overwhelmingly above Duke. After being helped by Lariette, it was impossible for Duke to be a match. Duke realised it as well.

"T-this is impossible...!"

"Why is it impossible?"

Dedric smiled boldly and smacked him in the back of the head. Thanks to Ark's overwhelming strength, even his pets were acting dismissively.

"Dammit, we'll see! Cheetah Feet!"

Duke was eventually forced to admit the difference in strength between him and Ark. Once his pride was lost, he thought of escaping using Cheetah Feet. It was an escaping skill that increased his movement speed by 30%! But Ark had been aiming for that moment.

"Sprint!"

Ark shot forward like an arrow and slashed Duke's leg. In his completely defenceless state, Duke received a critical hit. However, Ark wasn't aiming for the abnormal state then the damage.

-The additional 'Cutting' effect of Drastic Measures had been activated.

<Duke's Achilles tendon has been severed>

Cutting! When he succeeded in 'Cutting,' he could cut off a monster's limbs. But against a user, he could only sever the tendon. Anyway, Ark succeeded in the using 'Cutting' and slowed down Duke's movements. Rather than his movement speed slowing down, he couldn't even move that leg. At the same time, the 'Cheetah Foot' skill was released from his legs.

"T-this is.....!"

Duke had suddenly become a 2nd grade disabled person and tried to counter attack. However, both legs were required for a ranger to shot his bow accurately and with a fast firing speed. Thanks to one leg being unusable, the firing speed of his arrows went down by 50% and kept on missing. Ark avoided the arrows and damaged the other leg. After a couple of minutes, Duke was forced to the ground as his other Achilles tendon was cut. But that was not the end of Ark's brutality.

“Damn, just kill me!”

Duke shouted with desperation but Ark just smiled and shook his finger.

“I can’t finish this so easily. Now, this time is the arms!”

“What, what the?”

He moved around Duke and attacked his arms. After a while, Duke was down to 3% health while his arms couldn’t move. Thus Duke changed from a 2nd grade to a 1st grade disabled person with none of his limbs working.

“Y-you.....!”

Duke talked wildly with his face in the ground.

“Ark-nim, I know you’re angry.....but it is too much.”

When Lariette looked at him with pity, Duke’s face became hot. Indeed, a pioneer looking so shabby and being pitied would definitely injure his pride. But Ark wasn’t trying to injure Duke’s pride when he did this. There was a wide and deep meaning for his actions.....

Ark walked up with Buksil who had a swollen face and laughed.

“Buksil, now it’s your turn.”

“Huh? What?”

“What? Do you need to ask? You don’t know why I bothered slicing his limbs?”

“Well, let’s see? There’s a serious problem in Ark-nim’s personality.....”

“What the?”

“Oh, no, how could I possibly understand the deeper meaning behind Ark-nim’s actions?”

“Ah.....you’re right.”

Ark looked at Buksil with pity in his eyes before speaking.

“Is your head okay? Your memory? Don’t you remember what happened a few minutes ago? He beat you up. If I hadn’t stopped him then he would’ve killed you. But there’s even more. Your brother Sapjil had no choice but to die in the Abyss of

Despair because of those guys. With your enemy so close to you, I had to make sure that a chicken like you could get some payback."

"But I'm a merchant. I'm not strong like Ark-nim."

Buksil sighed with a gloomy face. Ark wrapped an arm around Buksil and bent down. He then whispered a secret into Buksil's ears.

"It's okay. Now that guy is weaker than you."

"Then perhaps.....?"

"Think of it as a New Year's gift."

Ark smiled sweetly. Buksil looked at Duke dumbly for a moment. But Ark was behind him whispering 'Show me you're a man, take revenge for your brother!' and a slow smile grew on his lips. Then he finally took out a stick and started hitting Duke.

"Hahaha, didn't you hit me before? Take this! This and this!"

Wouldn't a weak man become more violent when he suddenly gained power? That described Buksil perfectly. After experiencing the taste of endorphins like adrenaline and dopamine, he went into a completely frenzied state and beat up Duke. His eyeballs rolled around and he went into a dangerous state. However, Buksil was still Buksil. The frenzied state did not last long.

"You....bastard.....Buksil.....I'll remember your name and face..... You'll soon see.... "

Duke's face was dyed with colours from bruises and glared at him with his full power. Buksil suddenly felt like cold water had been poured on his spirit.

"Ack, w-what have I done.....?"

Buksil realized what a huge mistake he had made at Ark's urging. Buksil already knew Duke's identity. He was one of the pioneers of the Hermes Alliance, one of the 5 alliances settled in Nagaran! It was no different from antagonizing the Hermes Alliance. If a mere merchant built up such a large grudge then he would have to give up the game.

"No, I.....it's not my idea...."

Buksil stuttered as he stepped backwards.

No, it was when he attempted to step back. Someone pushed him as he stepped back and he ended up stepping on Duke's face.

.....It was a critical hit.

Duke's health disappeared from the blow. Buksil jumped and quickly tried to give excuses. But Ark went forward and clamoured loudly.

"Indeed Buksil! That last blow was the best. I never thought you would end it by stepping on his head. You never even blinked an eye at his threat. Wonderful!"

"N-no, Ark-nim! I never meant to do that....."

"Ugh! Okay, you son of a bitch.....! You'll see.....!"

Duke eventually hung his head and died. A pioneer had literally been stepped to death by a merchant. Duke had been raging with anger when he was stepped on and died so Buksil's immediate future was dark. But Buksil's tragedy didn't end there. With two dings, a new message window appeared.

-Buksil has murdered a player and became chaotic!

"Huk, c-chaotic!"

Buksil screamed when he saw his name turn to red. Ark smiled wickedly while watching Buksil.

'Huhuhu, just as planned.'

Yes, that was the reason why Ark made Duke unable to fight and incited Buksil. Jewel's group had stormed the NPC village and occupied it. Thanks to clever planning, Jewel, Duke and Hermes members managed to avoid becoming chaotic. In order to avoid becoming chaotic, they would attack and then avoid dealing the final blow. That was the problem. If Ark killed Duke then he would become chaotic. Of course, users had methods to avoid becoming chaotic even if they killed someone. If he received the first attack then the opponent's alignment would temporarily fall and become grey. In that person was killed then he wouldn't become chaotic. But Buksil had been so excited it wasn't possible to think and he attacked Duke first.

'I'm level 280 so the chaotic penalty will be quite extravagant!'

He realised this while fighting Duke. So he made Duke unable to fight and forced the kill onto Buksil.

'Huhuhu, I've taken care of Duke and Buksil.'

Being chaotic was a disaster for a merchant. They wouldn't be able to freely enter or leave a village. In addition, their combat abilities were lower than warriors so they couldn't defend against hunters. They would have to stay in jail until their chaotic state was released. A chaotic user was also likely to be robbed by general users.

'And now he had a hostile relationship with the Hermes Alliance.....'

It wasn't possible for Buksil to live without Ark's protection anymore. Although he was acting a little suspiciously before, as a chaotic user would he dare attack Ark without any hesitation? So he was protected from betrayal until the chaotic state was released. Killing two birds with one stone. No, three birds!

'Hahaha, why am I this smart?'

Ark smiled warmly and approached Buksil.

"Well done Buksil. You are indeed a man!"

"Huh? I, I....."

"You proudly took revenge on your brother! Huhuhu, aren't you thankful? But don't forget whose protection you're under. You owe me one. Do you understand?"

The poor merchant was dropped into a hopeless despair while Ark patronized him.

'It was planned! That bastard expected this from the beginning! I actually felt grateful to him for a moment.....I'm so stupid!'

Buksil hurled curses at himself. However, the bus had already left. His weakness had been grasped and all he could do was suck it up.

"Ark-nim, now what?"

Then Lariette and Bona who had been hiding asked.

"Let's see....."

Ark sighed and shook his head. The problem regarding Duke was resolved.

'Let's organize my thoughts for a moment.'

Ark's main purpose was to save Beseutyu in order to find a clue for the quest. But it was close to impossible at the moment. Ark's present power consisted of Lariette, a

pig, a child and a dog. Against Jewel's group and the 400 Nakujuk, it simply wasn't possible to him to rescue Beseutyu.

'If that's the case, the only remaining way is.....'

Ark glanced at Bona and asked.

"Bona, didn't you say that Beseutyu wanted to ask for help from other villages? Are there a lot of the Baran clan spread throughout the south?"

"Yes, very much. There are many several times larger than this village."

"Will they help us if we find them?"

That was the method Ark came up with. It was too difficult to save Beseutyu by himself. In addition, he didn't have the power to prevent the Nakujuk from taking over the Netherworld. After the Baran were told of the threat, they would have no choice but to rally against the Nakujuk. But Bona sighed and shook his head.

"It isn't easy to meet the Baran clans since they are spread throughout the south. And visiting them to ask for help is ineffective. The Baran don't know how to fight."

"What? What are you saying? Then what you said earlier.....?"

"In fact, the Myutal with a warrior's lineage is the Baran clan. When the Baran used to live in the north, they would constantly fight against monsters and the Nakujuk. They would go out in groups and fight against the Nakujuk. But eventually the Baran were chased from the north by the Nakujuk and they dispersed in the south. The Baran won't move unless all the clans move."

"Then shouldn't we go and visit them?"

"It's difficult because the tribes don't interact with each other. There is a method to call them.....by lighting the Pledge Beacon."

"The Pledge Beacon?"

"Yes, it's a beacon on top of the Golgi Mountains. But the only one who can light the beacon is an elder of the Baran clan. And Grandpa is the only elder in our village."

.....In the end he still needed to rescue Beseutyu.

'Unbelievable. Why is it so complicated?'

Ark felt like his insides were burning. Jewel would soon figure out that Duke died. Of course Jewel would furiously leave the boundaries of the village in order to catch Ark. With Ark's current strength there was no way to defeat them. But he couldn't run away blindly.....

'Wait? That Jewel.....?'

At that moment, a huge exclamation point appeared in Ark's head.

'There may be a way!'

Ark raised his head and looked at Duke's corpse lying on the ground. An evil grin appeared on Ark's mouth.

"Shall I give it a try?"

"Huhuhu, it is moving faster than I thought."

Jewel gave the tower being built a warm look. Jewel finally felt rewarded after suffering and dying.

'I never thought I would get such a good fortune in the Netherworld.'

Jewel reviewed the memories of the past few days. Not long ago, they had been besieged by Nakujuk after chasing Ark. While Jewel's group was desperately fighting the Nakujuk, they unexpectedly encountered a user with red hair. And there was an unexpected proposal. If the Hermes Alliance helped the Nakujuk conquer the Netherworld, portions of the southern region would be handed over to them. Jewel immediately informed Raiden of this fact. Since they had a way of contacting Raiden, Jewel hadn't been concerned about entering the Netherworld.

"There's no reason to refuse. Because I can break the alliance anytime with Trick."

Raiden left full control of the Netherworld to Jewel. Thus the Hermes Alliance joined forces with the Nakujuk. After they allied, the Hermes members and Nakujuk immediately took over the valley village. The Nakujuk couldn't conquer the Netherworld because they couldn't cross the northern mountains. There could use the Draken to carry them across. But the Baran clan regularly patrolled the skies using their skyrays and they couldn't bring across enough men to invade the south.

The reason 400 Nakujuk were able to move to the south was because of Jewel. In order to move the troops, Jewel used 'Mass Teleport' which was an advanced skill of

the Stalker. Of course the movement distance wasn't too far so it had to be used a few times, but the skill managed to move the troops safely to the south. And eventually they succeeded in invading the valley village.

"Once the tower at the outpost is finished, we can start conquering the Netherworld. Taking over the Netherworld would be simple with this tower!"

Jewel looked at the plans and smirked. That's right. Ark had already guessed that Jewel was creating the tower in order to use letter movement. And the tower in the north had already been completed by the Nakujuk. When the tower was complete, thousands of Nakujuk would pour into the south from their headquarters.

"How the hell did he manage to get his hands on these plans?"

Jewel was once again startled by the amazing plans.

Reception Tower for Letter Movement Plans (Architect: Magaro)

You can build a reception tower for letter movement.

When you build the reception tower, you will be able to teleport from connected towers using the 'Letter Movement Orb.' In addition, the technology in these plans is one step higher than the towers created on middle earth. It is probably because alchemy has modified the original design.

<Required skill: Magic (Advanced), Alchemy (Advanced), Architecture (Advanced)>

These plans were also given to them by the Red Man.

Jewel had advanced magic while the warriors had advanced alchemy and architecture so they were able to immediately build the tower. That was probably why the Red Man requested Jewel's help. He was able to control the Nakujuk and get a rare plan yet he passed it to some unknown users. But Jewel didn't think too deeply.

'I don't know what he's up to but he's only one person. We can easily defeat him after we conquer the Netherworld. And after Nagaran is controlled.....'

Raiden and Jewel were satisfied with what the Red Man gave them. Once the Netherworld and Nagaran were fully controlled, they would have time to obtain the treasures in the Netherworld.

'Raiden has entrusted the Netherworld to me so I have to conquer it!'

Jewel was dreaming about the rosy future. Suddenly someone approached from far away with an odd gait. Jewel frowned with confusion.

“What the? Duke? How did it go? That kid?”

Yes, it was none other than Duke who went chasing after Bona a few hours ago. But why was Duke's state so weird? His face was black with bruises and his eyes seemed like it couldn't focus. He also didn't have any of the Nakujuk that left with him.

“Why are you alone? And what happened to your face?”

Then Duke hesitated before bending down and writing something.

-There's no time. Ark has come.

“What? A-Ark?”

Jewel asked with surprise while Duke nodded.

“Where? Where is he?”

-Near the eastern forest. We have to hurry. That guy returned to the village and ran away when he saw us.

“What, what the? So right now.....!”

-The problem is that he's not alone. The reason he came back here was to take care of us. Do you remember the previous colleagues we saw at the siege? He brought them here.

“He gathered his colleagues? How?”

-I do not know. Anyway, the Nakujuk were completely killed by them. I barely got away. Thanks to that, they know we have an alliance with the Nakujuk. So he'll probably run away again. If we don't follow him quickly with our forces then we'll lose him.

Jewel's heart was frantic after Duke's explanation. An opportunity to capture Ark had arrived at Jewel's feet. There would be no time to catch Ark once they started conquering the Netherworld with Ark. They had to get revenge while the opportunity was still here. So Jewel quickly gathered some troops.

“They should have 50 people if he gathered his old colleagues. I'll leave some troops in the village with everyone else chases after Ark. Hurry up!”

Jewel left 150 troops to monitor the residents while chasing after Ark with the rest of the Nakujuk and Hermes members. Then Jewel suddenly asked Duke something.

“Ah, but why have you suddenly bothered with writing everything?”

Duke flinched. After a moment he nodded and wrote.

-My throat is swollen badly after a cold.

Note: For people wondering why Buksil became chaotic is he attacked Duke first. Remember that Ark showed up afterwards and Buksil blocked Duke to allow Lariette and Bona to escape. We don't know what happened then so Buksil might've attacked Duke first and got a grey name. O

Act 6: Attack X

“Elemental Sword Ice property, Flash!”

A bolt of light swept through the Nakujuk. At the same time, the surrounding chill slowed down the movements of the Nakujuk dramatically.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark used complicated foot movements to move through the gaps in Nakujuk. Then he attacked the Nakujuk with his Dark Blade chain skill. ‘Dark Strike’ and quickly inflicted critical hits. Ark used the element of surprise to inflict the constant critical hits, making the Nakujuk run around in confusion.

“Ugh, what, what the?”

It's just one person! Just surround him and seal his movements!”

“Heung, do you think I'll let you act freely.

At that time, Dedric flew down from the sky. Dedric shot at the Nakujuk like an arrow and exclaimed.

“Disciple, do it now!”

“Okay. I call on the Holy Land, don't allow them to become corrupt. Innocence field!”

After buffing them up, Lariette used a wide area magic. An intense light swirled around the area. It was the Innocence Knight's wide area magic which deals

continuous damage and decreases the opponent's defense. So the group of Nakujuk dissolved under the combination of Ark, Lariette and Dedric's attacks.

'I hope Razak is holding up well.....'

Ark had come up with a solution before attacking the Nakujuk. How could he rescue Beseutyu from the valley village? Ark had been troubled by that until he remembered something Buksil said in the past. Buksil was lacking sleep thanks to Ark so he tended to doze off while moving. Then he would suddenly say 'ugh, Ark-nim please save me. Although you might not listen to me, please stop making the zombie foxes!' He was talking while sleeping.

Talking during sleep was a hint.

'Right, come to think of it.....Dedric 'Vampirism' skill was also effective on users. Then perhaps Razak's skill could also be applied to a user? Can he control that guy.....?'

Ark looked at Duke's body and visualized a brilliant manoeuvre. He could revive Duke using Razak's 'Death's Equations.' The current number of enemies Ark had to face was the 400 Nakujuk and Jewel's group. But the situation would change if he could lure Jewel's group and some Nakujuk from the village. Of course, using 'Vampirism' on a user had a low probability of success. 'Death's Equations' was also the same. In addition, Duke was high ranking so he had to use 3 ribs in every try. It was a huge damage. But there was no other way.

"Razak, use 'Death's Equations'!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack.....

Razak sighed deeply and slowly removed his ribs. The unexpected profession he evolved to caused Razak to become gloomier. Anyway, 3 times.....he used 9 ribs before the skill barely succeeded. Yes, the Duke who lured Jewel out was a zombie.

'In the beginning it was a little vague, but isn't it an unexpectedly useful skill?'

Ark never dreamed that he could take advantage of 'Death's Equations' in this way. Anyway, Ark's operation to storm the village was a success. However, there were still 150 Nakujuk left in the village even after Jewel took some out.

'I can handle it if I attack small groups but.....'

He didn't know how long Jewel would be tricked. In fact, 'Death's Equations' had some limits. The distance that the zombies could move away from the controller was

quite far but it wasn't indefinite. So Razak hid and directed Duke to take Jewel's group around the area of the village. Thus there was a time limit on tricking Jewel's party.

'I have to quickly save the residents and get out.'

Ark was determined to take a risk. While Jewel was missing, he would focus on attacking one place with all his power. The place Ark aimed for was.....

"Keuahahak!"

"Surprise attack, surprise attack!"

The Nakujuk in the watchtower spotted them and sounded the horns. At the same time, a hundred Nakujuk flocked like a cloud. But Ark's eyes just searched the corpses without paying any attention to the gathering Nakujuk.

"Radun, quickly pack the items dropped by the Nakujuk.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun ran boldly and examined the corpses. The list of all the japtém Radun swallowed appeared before Ark. After a while, Ark finally found the item he was looking for in the list.

-Radun had acquired the 'Nakujuk's Crude Key.'

"That's it Radun. Give it to me!"

Radun vomited out the key it swallowed on Ark's command. Ark picked up the key and held it to the iron door. The iron door opened and all the children of the village came pouring out. Yes, Ark attacked the jail where the children were being imprisoned. The children were the weapons Ark prepared to defeat the Nakujuk. The kids came out and rushed towards Ark who had food prepared. It was the dish that he cooked for Hae Gyeol-sa, the founder of the intimidation skill in order to increase his voice.

"Oh Ark-nim, those fellows are right in front of you!"

"Wait a minute. Have you ate everything?"

The children became quite hungry in prison so they nodded after the food disappeared in an instant. Ark waved his hand like a conductor and said.

“Now, do you remember what you have to say when I make this signal?”

“Yes!”

“Daddy! Ark-nim saved us!”

“Okay, good. One, two!”

“The Nakujuk are coming! Save us!”

The village shook with the children’s’ cries thanks to the food which increased the volume of their voices. Its effect showed immediately.

“What, what the! This sound is?”

“Children, the children’s’ voices!”

“Ark? Who is Ark?”

“He is the foreigner who rescued Bona not so long ago. He came back!”

“Oh, that person rescued the children?”

“But it’s seems dangerous. They need help!”

The adults involved in the construction of the Reception Tower stopped moving. Then the Nakujuk supervisor ran to them and swung the whip with a perplexed expression.

“This fellow, you’re not behaving? Do you want to die?”

“Shut up!”

“What, what the? Are you crazy?”

“You’re the crazy ones! Locking up our children and threatening us.....! Bolkanasu, strike!”

Roaaaaaar!

The Bolkanasu shrieked at its trainer’s command and crashed into the supervisor. He was not the only one. The other trainers also used their monsters to attack the supervisors. The Baran members also picked up pickaxes or shovels and swung them. Thanks to Ark rescuing their children, the Baran caused a riot at the construction site making the Nakujuk panic.

‘Yes, it was successful!’

Ark clenched his fists when he saw the disorder in the village. Yes, this was what Ark came up with. The Baran said that they weren’t warriors. However, Ark felt like this was just a simple excuse. While their strength and stamina couldn’t compare to the Nakujuk, they had the trained monsters as weapons. Yet they never thought about fighting back because of fear. They would still be the same even if Ark helped them.

‘But.....’

Ark knew. Parents would become so much braver when their child was at risk. His father who passed away was like that. Although he usually never got into arguments, if Ark returned after being hit his father would become furious and fear nobody. Despite her illness, his mother never lost her smile for Ark’s sake. And he learned that the hearts of the NPCs in New World was no different from humans. They would be willing to die against the Nakujuk for their children.

“That’s it! Buksil, Bona, take the children to a safe place.”

“Yes Ark hyung. Now, follow me!”

Bona nodded and retreated with the children.

“Come with me Lariette-nim!”

Ark led Lariette and the flock of Nakujuk towards the construction site. A fierce battle was being waged at the construction site. However, there were a limited number of monsters that the Baran could use to deal with the Nakujuk. When the Baran rushed in at the beginning, it seemed like the Nakujuk was pushed back. After the formation remained intact and the battle prolonged, the Baran clan and their monsters were the ones collapsing. Reality was still reality. Despite fighting for their children, they couldn’t become Superman. Currently there were 100 Nakujuk troops there.

On the other hand, there were 70 Baran and 120 monsters. Despite the Baran clan’s overwhelming numbers, their combat power was a lot weaker. Furthermore, their only weapons were shovels or pickaxes. On the other hand, the Nakujuk were heavily armed with armour and weapons.

“Everyone please listen to me!”

Ark shouted towards the Baran clan.

"As you heard earlier, all the children are safe. But if you fall back here your children will be in danger again. You have to defeat the Nakujuk. You won't stand a chance at this point so rally to me!"

"That person is?"

"It's that person. That's Ark! The one who rescued the children! Didn't I tell you? The friend that worked for me once? At that time I already knew he wasn't an average person!"

The stable owner Ark had worked for jumped forward. Then the Baran clan flocked to Ark.

"Okay, follow my instructions."

"We'll do anything since you've rescued our children!"

"We'll do anything since you've rescued our children!"

Ark quickly took control of the Baran clan. However, Ark actually delegated the Baran to Lariette. That was all he needed to do to achieve victory in battle. And that simple action showed its enormous power. It was because of the special characteristics of a Holy Knight and Innocence Knight. A Holy Knight's true strength shone on the battlefield. He was able to stack up 3 buffs on all his subordinates. But was that all? Thanks to the influence of the Holy Knight, the troops moral would also rise. It was indeed a profession that existed for war, a maestro of the battlefield!

That was the Holy Knight.

Compared to the Holy Knight, an Innocence Knight was stronger in holy magic.

"Oh, my courage is rising quickly for some reason!"

Roaaaaar!

The monsters of the Baran clan also had their morale increased. They weren't the only ones who changed.

"Everyone attack!"

Lariette lifted her sword and shouted. She rushed towards a Nakujuk and struck it with her shield. Yes, she had finally fully awakened to her profession. An Innocence Knight who couldn't lead her troops into battle and death would be considered useless. Ark's dark attribute bonus increased his stats by 40% while another Hero

profession, the Innocence Knight applied stat bonuses to her allies. Currently her level was 180. However, she was the leader of a 70 people attack group and her level reached the mid-200s. The Holy Knight characteristics of Alan that had once pushed Ark to despair was now a strong ally.

“Yap, yap, yap, yap!”

Thanks to the small space, a Nakujuk fell to her attacks. With her black hair flying while fighting the Nakujuk, it looked like a scene from Joan of Arc. She was the embodiment of an Innocence Knight. Thanks to her, the situation was in their favour.

‘But the problem won’t be settled even if I win this battle. If Jewel’s party and the Nakujuk return, everything is screwed. I have to save Beseutyu before that happens.’

However he was unable to find Beseutyu at the construction site. A Baran member replied when he asked about Beseutyu’s whereabouts.

“Beseutyu-nim? He was caught shortly after he tried to escape and dragged back. The foreigners who came with the Nakujuk stayed at Beseutyu’s house so he’s probably trapped there.”

‘Beseutyu’s house!’

Ark looked at the large house located in the centre of the village.

‘I’ll leave this place to Dedric and Lariette. I don’t know how the situation will change so I have to rescue Beseutyu first.’

“Lariette-nim, I’m going to rescue Beseutyu.”

“Huh? Ah, yes!”

Lariette replied while still fighting. Anyway, Ark left the battlefield and headed towards Beseutyu’s house. Most of the soldiers were concentrated on the construction site so there were only a few sporadic battles inside the village. Ark assisted the Baran a few times while crossing the village. So Ark was able to arrive at Beseutyu’s house after a few minutes. The mansion contained a maze of shelves and bookcases densely packed together.

“Beseutyu-nim!”

A familiar voice was heard after Ark entered the house.

“Ah, Ark’s voice.....is it Ark? This way, this way!”

He followed the voice and saw a prison cage hanging from the ceiling. Beseutyu and Guran were trapped in there. Ark began to release the chains of the cage that were tied to a pillar. The Beseutyu touched an iron cane and shouted.

“How did you get here?”

“The explanation is too long.”

“Perhaps, have you perhaps seen Bona?”

“Don’t worry. Bona is taking the children to a safe place. There’s a lot I would like to ask....eh?”

Ark tilted his head to one side. Usually a key obtained in a specific area could be used to open all locks there. The key to the children’s prison also unlocked their shackles. So Ark thought the key would be able to open the cage. But the key didn’t match when he tried to use it.

‘What on earth is going on? Another key is necessary?’

Ark thought with an unbearable expression. Guran had been looking around with an anxious face and suddenly burst out.

“Ark-nim, behind you! Be careful!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the same time, the bookcases at the entrance collapsed like a domino and Ark was attacked. The bookcase was several metres high and had a tremendous weight! He would be completely flattened if it fell on him. Ark reflexively pushed the cage back and climbed on top of it. The cage tied with chains swung back like a swing and then swung forward and smashed into the bookcase. The hundreds and thousands of scrolls poured out like water.

“What the hell is this...?”

Ark asked with a bewildered expression when the shaking cage finally came to a halt. Then he saw a shadow approaching quickly before he felt a tremendous impact on his side. Ark flew back a few metres and crashed.

“Ark!”

Beseutyu and Guran called out from the cage. However Ark couldn’t hear their voices.

'Oh my God...!'

Ark lifted his head and swallowed his saliva. The shadow was a giant armed with thick steel armour and a huge two-handed axe. The face peering out from the helmet gave off a terrible impression.

"Kukukuku, I thought you would come here."

A warning message flashed as soon as the giant spoke.

-The Nakujuk Commander Kaljapeu has appeared!

But he didn't have time to confirm the warning message.

"You dared hinder the cause of the Nakujuk.....die!"

Kaljapeu's two handed axe fell downwards and caused a storm. Ark quickly rolled his body and narrowly managed to escape the attack. But he only had 50% of his health left. After leaving the construction site, he had been too busy to recovery his health. He never thought he would meet a mid-level boss.

'But even so.....'

He still had 60% health when entering the house. He had only been hit by the surprise attack, meaning that one strike reduced 10% of his health!

'Does that mean I can only endure five of his direct attacks? Damn, he's only level 350 but he has tremendous attack power. But he seems slow. With such incredibly high damage, his agility should be quite low. In addition, that thick armour will make him even easier to deal with.'

He had initially panicked but now Ark showed a confident expression. No matter how high, damage wasn't enough. In fact, Ark had no trouble with opponents that had high damage and defense but were slow. Andel and Leo were the first people he PKed and they were both warriors. It was because he could grasp the weak points even if the armour was very thick.

"Dark Dance!"

Ark used dazzling footwork to confuse Kaljapeu. As expected, Kaljapeu's movements were slow. Every time he took a thick armoured step, the whole house would shake. He couldn't overcome Ark's movements with such a heavy weight. However, it wasn't as easy to win as Ark thought.

Teteng!

He took advantage of the opportunity and swung his sword. A sound suddenly rang out and his wrists became heavy and dull. On the other hand, Kaljapeu only lost 1% of its health. The armour was too thick to deal any damage. In the meantime, Ark used his taekwondo skills which had defeated countless knights. He used a low kick to hit a place that would normally stun knights. However, the thickness of the armour was beyond his imagination and his kicks couldn't penetrate it. Kaljapeu just ignored the kicks and swung his axe. Ark had been careless and he became cornered in a few blinks of an eye.

'I'll get hit if I don't move!'

Ark used Riposte to push Kaljapeu back for the moment. No, he was trying to push. But a giant was the opponent. He was also a giant wearing several tons of armour. Rather than being pushed by Riposte, Ark flew back through the air.

'What is this bastard?'

Indeed, it was a tank. But there was still a way to defeat it.

'Even a tank has weaknesses. I just have to attack the place and this durable armour won't matter!'

He looked using Eyes of the Cat and spotted a red light in a gap in Kaljapeu's armour. It was Kaljapeu's weakness. Once Ark confirmed the weakness, he changed his strategy and used Dark Dance to spin around Kaljapeu with his sword. Once he reached Kaljapeu's back, he stabbed the sword in a gap in his armour. Then Ark witnessed an unimaginable scene.

In fact, Ark felt like something was wrong ever since Kaljapeu appeared. It was strange.....normal armour had different front and backs. However, Kaljapeu wore a rustic armour that looked the same in the front and back. It was a funny looking armour.....

Woodududuk!

When Ark tried to stab his sword, the armour completely twisted around and blocked the gap. There was a ringing sound and Kaljapeu's head turned 180 degrees. Not only that, both arms completely turned to the back. In a moment, the front and back were completely changed. And the moment Ark thrust his sword, Kaljapeu grabbed the blade with his glove and smacked him.

-You have received a critical hit, 550 damage!

<You have been stunned for 3 seconds>

Ark flew in an arc and hit the bookcase. The impact made his spirit feel like it was flying to Andromeda! But he was lucky that Kaljapeu was overflowing with strength. If he had fallen right in front of him because of the counterattack, he would be subjected to continuous attacks thanks to his stunned state. Fortunately he was released from his stunned state by the time Kaljapeu reached him but the situation had become worse. He had no chance in a frontal confrontation. The only way Ark could win was to attack the gap in the armour. However, if Kaljapeu could switch his front and back then Ark would have no chance of attacking the gaps. In addition, he would be vulnerable to a counter attack.

‘Shit, is he the T-400 Terminator or something?’

There was no point in standing around complaining. Since he couldn’t attack the gaps in the armour, Ark had only dealt 3% damage at most. However, Ark was hit by the counter attack and lost 10% health. With his 30% health, if he took three more hits or counter attacks then he would definitely die.

“Kukukuku, have you run out of techniques?”

Kaljapeu started swinging his axe. But.....it was true. He had no chance in a frontal confrontation and his taekwondo didn’t work either. Even his strategy to attack the weak point failed. Truly overwhelming! All Ark could do was run around. Fortunately he could avoid most of Kaljapeu’s attacks thanks to his high agility. However, New World’s combat system meant that he would still receive damage in a certain range even if he avoided the attack. Thanks to that, Ark’s health slowly dripped down lower and lower. In fact, it was natural that he would suffer. Kaljapeu was the commander of the Nakujuk Jewel’s group met when they crossed the northern mountains. Although he was only level 350, Jewel’s group needed 10 people to defeat him.

“I never thought I would meet such a tough ambush. The results of this encounter will be inevitable!”

Ark tightened his lips and felt like his insides were burning. The problem had become really serious once he encountered Kaljapeu. If Ark died then Razak’s Death’s Equations would be broken. So Jewel’s group would return to the village once they realised they’ve been deceived. It was obvious what would happen to the battle at the construction site.

'My resurrection location is at the valley village. Jewel will not miss such an opportunity. Once the town is occupied, a constant watch will be set on the totem. If Lariette or I die then we won't be able to resurrect again!'

Ark used Umma's Sap and endured. However, Umma's Sap only recovered 400 healths.

He only had 4 left so he would only be able to recover 1,600 healths.

"Kukukuku, it's no use even if you run away!"

While Ark was thinking, Kaljapeu had backed him into a corner and swung his axe. Ark lowered his body and hurriedly used Slide to escape between Kaljapeu's legs. He would do anything it took to live. But Ark surprisingly realized something thanks to this humiliating act.

"Ugh, this bastard.....!"

Kaljapeu jumped and showed signs of panic. Then he looked around briefly before finding Ark and approaching.

'What the? That response just now?'

Kaljapeu's reaction time was normally very fast. It was similar to Ark never missing a target when he used Dark Dance. Because of that, he could immediately switch back and forth if someone attacked from behind and then counter attack. But Ark sliding through the crotch, for a brief moment he could not determine Ark's location.

'Perhaps that guy.....?'

"Slide!"

Ark once again used Slide to pass underneath Kaljapeu's crotch. Although he showed less signs of panic than the first time, he still had difficulty finding Ark's location.

'There's no doubt. That guy.....can't see properly near his feet!'

Yes, Kaljapeu was wearing an armour of great thickness. His helmet was also very thick! With such a thick helmet on, he naturally wouldn't be able to see properly around his feet. So his blind spot wasn't his back but his feet.

'Aha, that's it!'

Ark devised a plan and immediately communicated with Dedric.

‘Dedric, what is the situation over there?’

“This.....it is a little cumbersome.....the battle is proceeding as planned.....over!”

‘Okay, then fly towards Beseutyu’s house right now!’

Ark commanded before running all over the place and pushing down bookshelves. The many bookcases filling up the mansion collapsed and scrolls came pouring out. The amount of scrolls was enough to fill up to his ankles. Then Dedric flew into the house after crossing the village.

“Master, I’m busy so why couldn’t you wait to call....huk! What is that?”

“You’ve arrived?”

Kaljapeu who had been chasing after Ark turned his head and swung his axe. But Ark was one step ahead and grabbed Dedric before diving into a roll. After avoiding the attack, the axe slammed into the ground and damaged it.

“This bastard, where are you? Cowardly bastard!”

Kaljapeu brandished his axe all over the place but Ark had already run far away. Dedric panted in another room and muttered.

“M-master, what is with that huge guy?”

“Shut up, there’s no time so listen to me.”

Ark quickly explained the operation. Dedric understood the majority of the situation and smiled before nodding.

“Oh, so that guy is just big and dumb?”

“That’s right.”

“Understood. I’m an expert.”

Dedric swam out among the scrolls. Even then Kaljapeu still couldn’t identify Ark’s location. His eyes had no way of reaching his feet and the scrolls also reached his ankle. Then he saw something rolling a few metres away.

“Are you there? You rat bastard!”

Kaljapeu approached and his axe fell. At the moment the scrolls scattered and a bat flew up to the ceiling. Dedric escaped the range of the axe and touched the ceiling while sticking out his tongue.

“Over here~.”

“What, what the? A bat? Ugh!”

Kaljapeu’s face stiffened as something attacked his sphincter. While Kaljapeu had been concentrating on Dedric, Ark dived between his legs and stabbed his crotch with a knife. Even though Kaljapeu realised the attack, he couldn’t do anything about it.

“This...this bastard...!”

Kaljapeu immediately tried to attack but Ark and Dedric had already dived among the scrolls. After that Kaljapeu became completely stupid. Ark and Dedric hid among the scrolls and would emerge at different times to attack Kaljapeu.

“Over here stupid!”

Dedric would run away and yell while Kaljapeu concentrated his gaze on him. Then Ark would close the distance and attack X. Kaljapeu wasn’t completely stupid so after a few repetitions, he would swing his head 180 degrees in the opposite direction that a shadow jumped. He determined that Dedric emerged first so Ark would attack from behind. But of course Ark would’ve thought of that response.

“You’ve misunderstood. I’m real this time.”

This time Ark smiled and ran away.

“Oh, that Kaljapeu didn’t even move a muscle!”

“Ark-nim is the descendant of Rarukan like expected!”

Guran and Beseutyu exclaimed from where they were watching in the cage.

.....To be honest, it wasn’t a nice enough fight that they could exclaim like that. They just stuck like a cockroach to the scrolls before emerging and either attacking or running away.

But this method had the best effect. Using this strategy, Ark was able to drive Kaljapeu into a critical condition. Then.....

“Time to finish this!”

Ark once again attacked Kaljapeu's sphincter. A dreadful scream emerged like a patient had haemorrhoids! Kaljapeu let out a huge scream and grabbed his ass as he died. The Nakujuk commander had pushed Ark into a corner several times and now looked pathetic as he died after having his sphincter attacked multiple times.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

Despite the difficult, he only rose 2 levels.

"Isn't it slightly pitiful now that I've seen it?"

However, Dedric just kicked his feet against the knife stuck in the Kaljapeu's ass.

"Hahaha, that's what you get for swinging your axe all over the place."

Then Kaljapeu dropped two items.

-Kaljapeu's Key

Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred (Magic)

Armour type: Plated Gauntlets

Defense power: 55 (+15)

Durability: 55/90

Weight: 40

User restriction: Level 200 or more Knight

Plated gauntlets used by the Nakujuk commander Kaljapeu. The Nakujuk clan has a history of intense hatred for other races. Their hatred is so dark and depraved that it seeped into the equipment they used. Moreover, Kaljapeu's hatred increased beyond imagination in his final moments and has created a special option.

<Option: Strength +20, Defense +15>

Special Option: You can use 'Berserk.' When Berserk is used, your hatred is amplified and your offense will increase by 5% for 20 minutes. Not available for those without the 'Hatred' stat. Cool down time: 2 hours>

"Eh? What is this?"

Kaljapeu was a boss monster so of course he would drop a magic item. But Ark discovered something different when reading the information window. Kaljapeu died while he was furious and created a new special option. Didn't that mean an item's properties could vary depending on the circumstances of death?

'Does that mean I can receive better items if I kill the Nakujuk while they're furious? Then I might be able to create special items in the same way with other monsters.

Items with better side effects would be sold at a higher price.

'I've discovered some good information!'

Attacking the X was a strategy which ensured the opponent would become furious. Ark became determined to refine his newly learned skill to attack X and picked up the key.

Act 7: Near Miss!

"Where the hell is that Ark child?"

Jewel frowned and complained. It had been one hour since the group had left the village. Jewel had circled the outskirts of the village several times but never found any traces of Ark. However, the Ranger Duke kept on finding traces of Ark so there was no way they could return yet. But Jewel found something strange during that time.

-Nearly there. I've found traces that Ark has just passed by here.

"How many times have you said those words?"

-Nearly there. I've found traces that Ark has just passed by here.

Those were the only words Duke would say after leaving the valley village. In fact, Razak didn't know how to write. So he wrote down what Ark told him to in order to lure Jewel out of the village. However Ark had left for the village so he could only repeat the last sentence over and over.

'What is with this guy? Did he eat something weird?'

Jewel didn't know the circumstances and just thought Duke was acting weird because he caught a cold. Well, his behaviour was still strange even with a cold.....

Jewel calmed down and followed behind Duke. Then Jewel suddenly heard a harsh sound.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

It wasn't a sound in the game. The banging sound came from reality. But Jewel just ignored it. When connected to the game, she was Jewel the Stalker. Reality just irritated Jewel. Even if she disconnected, the person on the other end would just talk nonsense. Jewel had no intention of stopping for nonsense when Ark was on the verge of being caught. However, she heard the voice speaking and had to exit the unit.

"Hey you! What the hell?"

'Eh? This voice is.....huh, what?'

Jewel opened the door of the apartment with a confused face. And felt chilled when she saw the visitor's face. The visitor was a friend who had been playing the game since the beta test. His ID in New World was Duke..... However, wasn't Duke chasing Ark around in the game? New World used biometric data so no one else could control the character. Then who was with Jewel inside the game?

"Dammit, why didn't you answer the phone?"

Duke asked with annoyance as he entered the room.

"That....who know I don't answer calls while playing the game. Rather, how are you here.....?"

"How?"

Duke breathed out and started complaining.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Anyway you have to hurry."

"What?"

"Dammit, it's Ark. While chasing after Bona, I happened to run into Ark and got killed by him so I frantically tried to call you. I wanted to let you know where he was. But you didn't answer the phone. Now he's probably already run away..... Anyway, I can't connect for 24 hours.....so it's really frustrating."

"Ark! You encountered Ark?"

Jewel realized what happened. She was confident regarding aspects of New World. If someone encountered something they couldn't understand in New World then it was most likely a skill!

‘Duke was killed by Ark. Then Duke’s ghost appeared and lured us out of town. Then.....’

Jewel didn’t know what method Ark used by he had deliberately deceived them and lured them out of the village! In fact, Ark was guilty of one big error when thinking about his plan. When Duke was killed, he could’ve called Jewel straight away in reality. While thinking about a skill in the game, it wasn’t possible to take reality into account. But fortunately, this strategy lasted for 1 hour despite its weak points because of Jewel’s habit of not answering the phone. However, Duke ended up visiting Jewel directly.

“Damn! Duke you’re dead!”

Jewel cursed and ran to the unit.

“What, what the? What are you doing?”

Duke was left scratching his head with a stupid expression.

“Grandfather!”

“Oh, Bona. You’re all right!”

Beseutyu was released from the cage and wept while hugging Bona. He had seen the same scene not too long ago.....Deja vu? Well, it was a minor scene so Ark checked over the situation in the village. While Ark was stabbing Kaljapeu’s sphincter with a knife, the Slave Liberation Army lead by Joan of Arc was able to defeat the Nakujuk after a fierce battle. But after the heat of the battle, they returned to the terrible reality. They sacrificed quite a few people in order to defeat the Nakujuk. The group of 70 Baran was reduced by 30 people. The damage to the monsters was even further as only twenty of them survived. The difference in combat power between the Nakujuk and the Baran was huge. Therefore there were quite a few orphaned children.

“Sob sob, Father.....Mother.....”

Ark felt his heart become heavier after hearing the children's cries. He was familiar with the grief of losing parents. Although they fought to save their children, Ark was the one who incited them to do it.

"It's not necessary to make that look."

Beseutyu seemed to guess what Ark was feeling as he tapped him on the shoulder.

"I heard everything while being locked in the cage. They intended to kill all of us once the tower was finished. Although 30 Myutal died, you ended up saving 40 of us. And their children as well. So don't beat yourself up about the victims."

Of course he would do that. Ark wasn't a sentimental person who would dwell on his guilt. They were NPCs. Although the well-crafted NPC felt human, a NPC was still a NPC. And now wasn't the time to be thinking about such things.

"Do you know what the Nakujuk are using the tower for?"

"I also heard it. I can't believe that the Nakujuk can freely move across the northern mountains when the tower is completed. The purpose of those guys.....conquest of the Netherworld!"

Beseutyu made it seem like he was stating a huge discovery.

"I already know that. So if you pull down the tower....."

Jewel and the Nakujuk conquering the Netherworld was a big deal for Ark. But since the Nakujuk utilized monsters to build the tower, Ark couldn't pull it down by himself. Beseutyu just shook his head and sighed.

"It's possible. But that would only buy some time. Those guys have the blueprint for the tower. While they possess the blueprints, their southern invasion is an inevitable fact.

"This....."

"There is only one way left. The Baran must rally together and fight against them."

"Are the odds in your favour?"

Beseutyu closed his mouth with a heavy expression. The meaning of his silence was obvious. Ark clearly knew about the huge difference between the Baran and the Nakujuk's combat abilities. So the Baran would have to unite despite those differences. Besides, if the Baran joined the war then the Hermes Alliance was likely to send some forces. There was no way the weak Baran group could match them.

‘I can’t prevent the Netherworld from falling into their hands.....’

Ark sighed with frustration. Beseutyu was also frustrated.

“Anyway, there is only one way now. In the past, the Baran fled from the Nakujuk but there is nowhere else to run. We will be forced to fight, even if everyone dies. I have to inform my people as fast as possible to allow them to prepare.”

‘Ah, before that there’s one thing I wanted to ask.’

Ark explained to Beseutyu what occurred in Magaro’s Laboratory. Beseutyu frowned and muttered as he thought.

“It can be seen but not touched.....perhaps he is speaking of Underground?”

“Underground?”

“Yes, that’s certainly it. My memory is vague but a long time ago a huge disaster occurred, the dimensions distorted and some areas were trapped in a dimensional gap.”

“Trapped in a dimensional gap? Then is there a method to return it intact?”

“I don’t remember all the details. The incident is similar to a myth or legend. But if they know the dimension distorting is a cause then there might be a solution. That’s right, records of the legend are in the A bookcase.....”

Beseutyu murmured and looked around before his face stiffened. The shelves had collapsed while fighting Kaljapeu, pouring thousands of scrolls onto the floor. In addition, Ark had swum around in the scrolls so they were all scrambled.

“Oh my god! How am I going to find the scroll in here?”

Beseutyu groaned as he looked around. Ark also thought it was an impossible task. How could they find one among thousands of scrolls? And time was of the essence. The time when Jewel and the Nakujuk would return to the village was unknown.

‘Razak hasn’t contacted me yet so there is no need to worry for the moment....’

Did they have to look for the scroll blindly? It wouldn’t be possible to obtain the clue once Jewel occupied the village again. Didn’t he also have to complete the quest before the Hermes guild occupied the Netherworld? Then, a perfect solution to find the scroll struck Ark.

“Are there any special markings on the scroll?”

“Marking? No, nothing like that. But all the records related to that legend is on the A shelf. So the strings closing the scroll would have the A symbol on it. As I recall, contents about ‘Underground’ seemed to be in the A-20 to A-30 scrolls.”

“I understand! Lariette-nim, call all the residents and tell them to gather here!”

Approximately 60 residents and children entered the house.

“Buksil, Lariette-nim, please distribute all of the Herbal Tea.”

Yes, he devised the idea of using the herbal tea. The herbal tea Ark distributed was the one to speed up their hand movements and improve their eye sight. Then he ordered them to search for the A-20 to A-30 scrolls. At any rate, Ark was the best at using people.

“Oh, what is this?”

“Why are hands are so fast?”

“And I can see that fine print completely from this far away.”

The effect of the herbal tea activated immediately. The Baran clan acted like pigeons picking up food and searched among the scrolls at an amazing speed. And someone soon found a necessary scroll.

‘Okay, five have already been found. Now only five more.....’

Ark was waiting anxiously.

Clack clack clack clack!

All of a sudden Razak ran into the mansion. Dedric lifted his head from where it was buried in a scroll and shouted.

“Master, those guys are coming back to the village!”

“What the?”

Ark jumped with surprise. He exited the mansion and saw a cloud of dust approaching in the distance. Jewel’s group was coming back to the village leading over 200 Nakujuk!

"Damn, how did they know? We should find the other five in around.....10 minutes. No, the work pace has quickened so it should be 7 minutes....."

"Oh my god! So close...."

Lariette moaned as she also exited the house. If Jewel's group noticed something strange then they would definitely try to catch Ark and the Baran. On the other hand, Ark's group contained children so their escape speed would be slower. There was no guarantee that they could elude the pursuit even if they left now. No, to be honest there was a 30% chance. But it would be impossible if he delayed for 7 more minutes. The village would be surrounded and they would be wiped out.

"Ark, this is a request."

At that moment Beseutyu approached and spoke to him.

"A request?"

"Yes, I've heard from Bona. You have a method to move to middle earth. As you know, the war in the Netherworld will begin soon. And win or lose, the Baran will suffer a harsh trial. It's our inevitable fate. But....."

Beseutyu turned his head and looked at the children moving in the mansion.

"I don't want the children to experience that. And anyway, it is impossible to flee from the Nakujuk with the children. So can you escape with all these children and their caretakers to the safer middle earth?"

Ark's eyes started flashing. Why had he never thought of that? That's right. Ark had a method to return to middle earth at any time. So he could still look for the scrolls without worrying about being chased by Jewel's group. It was like he had just opened a door and exited from a nightmare.

"It's not just to save the children. We also think that this is the best way. There are only 7 skyrays remaining. If I'm there then Guran and the other trainers will be able to use the skyrays. The Nakujuk will be unable to follow them on foot. Therefore they can quickly tell our kin about the situation."

Of course, Ark could also stay in the town until they found the scrolls. But there was one problem. The scrolls were all protected using a cipher passed down through Beseutyu's family. If he didn't go with Beseutyu then who would decipher the scrolls? But the clever old man had already thought of that.

"Although Bona is still immature, he can still solve the password for the scroll."

“Grandfather!”

Bona stared at Beseutyu with surprise. But Beseutyu just stroked Bona’s head and laughed.

“You don’t have to worry. Ark is someone you can trust. No doubt he will take you guys to a safe place. Just wait there safely until we come to pick you up.”

Bona was tearful but did not protest. Beseutyu wiped off his tears with a sleeve and nodded.

“I promise. I’ll definitely come pick you up.”

“Right.”

Beseutyu nodded and walked towards the skyrays with Guran and some trainers. Then, Lariette who had been hesitating suddenly shouted.

“I, I’ll go too!”

“Lariette-nim?”

Ark’s eyes popped out.

“Isn’t Ark-nim going to return to the Netherworld?”

Of course. That was why he was looking for the scroll.

“Ark-nim has to take the children to middle earth. But someone should also stay here. It is important to understand the situation in the Netherworld. And there is no guarantee of safety even on the skyrays. I-I will protect them.”

Ark looked at Lariette with bemusement. Her suggestion was unexpected. Didn’t she promise never to get on a skyray again? So he couldn’t understand why she intended to stay in the Netherworld. But it wasn’t bad to have Lariette stay behind. Ark still hadn’t abandoned the Netherworld. If Jewel’s group occupied the Netherworld then there would be nowhere for Ark to hide. He had to do whatever it took to stop it. And the power of the Baran clan was needed to stop their ambitions. In the war Lariette would help the Baran clan tremendously so it was welcomed.

“I understand.”

Ark nodded and Lariette mumbled something.

"Then.....please tell me your phone number."

"Huh? Phone number?"

"Ark-nim will be in middle earth but you will need to know the situation in the Netherworld. But you can't use the Feather of Whispering to communicate between dimensions...."

"Ah, yes...."

Ark nodded and told her his phone number. And Lariette blushed before clenching her fist tightly. After that Beseutyu called from the sky ray, and she clenched tightly to Beseutyu with a pale face before vanishing with a scream.

'She's so scared but still volunteered.....Lariette-nim is surprisingly responsible.'

Ark thought Lariette wanted to stay behind because of a sense of responsibility towards the Baran. However, Lariette had a separate ulterior motive. Her feelings for Ark were still too ambiguous. Lariette wanted to confirm if her feelings for Ark was like a friendly colleague or something more. Every time she was alone with Ark.....she would become confused and change the subject. However, if she returned to middle earth then she would lose all justification to follow Ark. But if Lariette remained in the Netherworld then Ark would obviously have to contact her. Moreover, didn't she naturally ask for his phone number? Lariette had a surprisingly smart plan.

Anyway, Ark once again entered the mansion once Beseutyu's group left.

'10 grams of the Dimension Movement powder can move 1 person. Currently, there are 50 remaining adults and children. I'll have to create a magic circle using 500 grams of powder.'

Ark cleared the floor of scrolls and started making a magic circle.

"Ark-hyung, I've found another one!"

'Okay, we can find everything and still leave in time!'

Meanwhile, the Baran had been busy finding the scrolls. By the time he finished drawing the magic circle, they had found nine scrolls. Now there was only one left so obviously the last one would be a huge problem.

"Ark-hyung, we've search everyone but we can't find the last one."

The 50 Baran had drunk the herbal tea and searched the mansion. Even so, they could not find the final piece. And Jewel's group had already entered the village and was rushing towards the house. Beseutyu said that the Underground was written in one of those scrolls. Couldn't the content be written in one of the nine scrolls?

'Nine scrolls are found so the probability is 90%. But considering my luck it would probably be in that one scroll....'

It was like missing just one number in bingo. But there was no more time to hold out. Ark clenched his teeth and pointed towards the dimly shining gate.

"It can't be helped. Leave the last chapter. Everybody go inside the gate. Children first! And then the adults. Hurry. Those guys are already reached the mansion.

The Baran plunged into the gate one by one under Ark's command. Then Bona who was one of the last ones to leave stood beside Ark at the gate and looked around. Then Bona's eyes brightened and he exclaimed.

"Ark hyung! Over there, A-7! It's the last chapter!"

"What?"

Ark turned his head. After a moment of concentrating, he was able to find the scroll. The last chapter was wedged between a fallen bookcase near the entrance. Then Jewel's group entered at the same time he saw the scroll.

"Ark!"

"Eh, that gate? The Baran clan are running away!"

"Dammit, the timing is really amazing."

Ark cursed.

"Dedric, take Bona first and enter the gate. Razak, transform!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak who had been waiting next to him changed into the Saw Blade. Ark picked up the Saw Blade and used Sprint to approach Jewel's cronies. Jewel obviously thought Ark was running away and tried to stop him. But Ark's special move instantly left his mouth.

"Ya, this.....would you guys like to be turned to meat? I'll beep- and beep-to you!"

The vulgar words were shot out rapidly as their faces turned red. Under the effect of Intermediate 'Intimidation,' Jewel's group stiffened. At the same time Ark ran up and jumped, smashing into a warrior at the front. Then he used the face as a stepping stone and continuously swung his blade while moving. The blade turned into a whip and grabbed a scroll underneath a bookcase. Then the whip returned and the scroll was brought to Ark's hand.

'I got it!'

Ark picked up the scroll and turned towards the gate. At that moment the stiffness wore off and a warrior grabbed his ankle. Thanks to that, Ark fell to the floor like a frog. His health was decreased as well. But that wasn't the problem.

"Bastard, we've caught you!"

"This is our chance, smash him. Heroic Strike!"

"Stun him then drive his health down to the bottom!"

PVP after falling down in the middle of enemy territory? Wasn't there a game that was briefly popular in the early 2000s where these kinds of situations were common? With such a memory, Ark didn't have to explain his current situation. He was hit by a waterfall of skills! Jewel's group and the Nakujuk surrounded him while his health quickly decreased.

'Everything is finished if I die!'

Ark rolled on the ground and barely escaped the attacks but he was already in a critical condition. However, it was fortunate that he entered a critical condition. Thanks to that his 'Adrenaline' activated and his defense and reflexes increased by leaps and bounds. Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the attacks and run to the gate. And just as he was about to throw his body into the gate.... Suddenly, dozens of chains emerged from the ground and wound around his body. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-You have been caught by the advanced 'Restraint' spell.

<You can't move for one minute However, it will be automatically cancelled when attacked>

It was a magician's chain skill. The skill limited his movements but it would be released once he was attacked. It was a useful skill when dealing with a lot of monsters. However, Ark was in a critical condition so one good attack would kill him.

“Don’t touch him, I’m going to handle it!”

Jewel moved forward and chanted a spell. Jewel used Magic Harmony to combine her two strongest spells. The incantation time was very long so it couldn’t be used in a 1-on-1 battle. However, it was so strong that it would instantly reduce a warrior’s health by 40%.

‘D-damn.....only one more step....ah, no!’

“This is for messing with us! Blizzard, Hellfire!”

The two different kinds of magic left her hands in a spiral and Ark was hit with fire and ice. His body received an enormous shock and ran out of health. And.....a message appeared that he never wanted to see.

-You’ve been killed by Jewel-nim’s attack!

“I did it! I got him!”

Ark collapsed while Jewel’s group laughed and ran around like crazy. They had managed to avoid becoming chaotic when occupying the village but they were willing to become chaotic if it meant killing Ark.

“His resurrection point is at the valley village. Now he’s caught like a rat in a trap!”

But Jewel was unaware of one thing. A faint smile appeared on Ark’s mouth.....

‘Okay, now’s the time!’

Ark said in his mind. All of a sudden the Saw Blade in Ark’s hand started vibrating. At first the sound was low and then it started building up. Then the vibration burst and Ark’s health was restored.

-Razak’s ‘Pledge of Death’ skill has been triggered.

Ark has automatically changed health with Razak.

Yes, it was a Death Master’s special skill ‘Pledge of Death!’ When the summoner died, the pet would show absolute proof of its loyalty and exchange health with the Master. Thanks to that, Ark’s penalty of all stats -1 was applied to Razak but Ark had his health restored by 3000 points.

‘I never thought I would be assisted in this way!’

“Although it is urgent, I can’t just leave like this. Demonic Opening!”

“Ugh!”

Ark pulled out Gwisal’s sword and stabbed Jewel in the ass. It was the special move he used against Kaljapeu, attacking X. In addition, he used Demonic Opening so attacking X became even more painful. Jewel burst out screaming from the surprise attack and collapsed.

“Razak’s revenge!”

Ark said with a cool smile before diving into the gate. Although Jewel’s group realized that there was something one, the gate had already disappeared and they just ended up diving into the ground. The Hermes group looked around stupidly before turning to Jewel and saying.

“Sphincter.....is it alright?”

“Captain, hold on.....”

Lee Myung-ryong was drinking coffee in the SWAT team’s break room.

“What?”

“That.....a suspicious guy has come.”

The SWAT team member spoke in a low voice.

“It’s about the year-end party the other day. When Hyun-woo was attacked by those hoodlums.”

“So?”

“Someone watching the fight filmed Hyun-woo with a phone. Luckily it was blurry so Hyun-woo’s face wasn’t recognizable. Just now some guy brought a picture and asked us if we knew the person. The owner of the pub we were drinking in mentioned that we had a year-end party on that day....’

“Who was he? Another policeman?”

“He doesn’t seem to be the police. Based on his conversation, he was looking for someone. He was similar to someone they’re looking for inside a game. He tried to ask me but I just rattled on and didn’t give any information.”

“He came to the National Police Agency and dared to act like that?

“That guy doesn’t understand the world.”

The SWAT team member laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“Anyway, it’s related to Hyun-woo so I thought I would tell you.”

Lee Myung-ryong turned the coffee cup and thought about it. A cell phone video with Hyun-woo. He didn’t know it was Hyun-woo. Yet that person sought the police just to find him. Then there could only be one simple answer. That person had a purpose for finding Hyun-woo and he was willing to use money to do it. In other words, the purpose couldn’t be good. But what was the purpose? He already knew the answer. If they were searching for someone in a game then it was someone with a grudge against Hyun-woo in New World. And just like Andel, he was looking for Hyun-woo to return a grudge.

“Hyun-woo, what are you doing in the game that is making you so many enemies?”

Lee Myung-ryong scratched his head and muttered. Then, the SWAT team member opened his eyes and asked.

“Game? Didn’t the other situation also happen because of a game?”

“What about it?”

“Hah, I don’t understand it. Deliberately searching for someone because of a game.....”

“Hey, don’t ignore the game!”

Lee Myung-ryong huffed and shouted. In fact, Lee Myung-ryong didn’t understand it either when the situation with Andel and Hyun-woo occurred. It was only a game. Bringing any grudges into reality felt strange. However, he now understood after playing the game. Raising a character while suffering the pain of broken limbs.....Lee Myung-ryong truly felt like Isyuram was an alter ego. If something happened to Isyuram then he wouldn’t sit still either. Lee Myung-ryong suddenly thought of an unpleasant memory and became angry.

‘That child is dead.’

Not long ago, Lee Myung-ryong had saved a merchant called Sid.

And he gave the first user he became familiar with the unicorn horns worth 1,000 gold who sold it for 851 gold. Lee Myung-ryong became aware of this fact after

spending several days in Giran. When he thought about it, he also felt like hiring a fixer and returning the grudge. But Lee Myung-ryong was still part of the Special Criminal Measures group and the fact that he was playing the game was a secret. Therefore he couldn't mention it to the SWAT team member. So Lee Myung-ryong had to pretend ignorance even though he was aware of the situation. He understood the feelings but to put up multiple bounties for one target? That silly person was confusing the game with reality and thought 21st century Korea was the Wild West. He didn't know what someone like Andel would do.

"So where is he now?"

"I left him at the waiting room near the gym."

"The gym?"

Lee Myung-ryong smiled and spoke.

"Okay, then I should go to the gym and do a little work."

"A tour?"

A twenty something year old man asked. The man neatly dressed in a suit was an employee of Global Exos, Ho Myung-hwan. He was visiting the National Police Agency on business. Not long ago, Ha Myung-woo watched a video and noticed that it was similar to the user fighting the boss Valderas in the Event Quest so he asked Ho Myung-hwan to find the protagonist of the video. However, it wasn't as easy to find the hero of the movie as it sounded. The face couldn't be identified properly in the video shot. He had been hoping that someone reported the violent incident at a nearby police station. Then, coincidentally he received information that the SWAT team was having a year-end party at a pub near there.

'SWAT team....that's right, why didn't I think of that? The hero of the movie had considerable martial arts skills. Maybe he had been learning martial arts for a long time. That person might be a part of the SWAT team. It isn't strange that a SWAT team member would fight against hooligans.'

That was why Ho Myung-hwan came to visit the National Police Agency. But when he asked a SWAT team member, he was asked to wait here before the person disappeared somewhere.

'I've come to the right place. His expression when looking at the screen indicated that he knew something. Huhuhu, who knew that I would find something from such a blurry video? Perhaps I have the mindset of a detective?'

While Ho Myung-hwan was praising himself, the SWAT team member returned.

"There is someone who knows. That person is currently out in the field....but it is almost time for him to exercise. Oh, do you mind taking a short tour of the gym while you're waiting?"

'Hmmm, the police are acting pretty nice.'

"I understand."

"Come along."

Ho Myung-hwan nodded and the SWAT team member showed him around the gym. When he entered the gym equipped with clean, modern facilities, he immediately heard loud sounds coming from around the gym. The atmosphere felt warm despite the winter chill and Ho Myung-hwan inwardly exclaimed.

'Ah, the police train their bodies every day to protect the citizens!'

Ho Myung-hwan was glad to be called a proud citizen of South Korea. Ho Myung-hwan was guided around the various martial artists sparring and sat down. How much time had passed? Just as he was becoming bored, the SWAT team member arrived.

"Are you bored?"

"No, well...."

"If you're bored, would you like some hands-on practice?"

"Hands-on practice?"

"It's not something hard. Just a light spar. In fact, sometimes the National Police Agency helps citizens get some experience in self-defence. It is different according to size and experience so you should just think of it as lightly sweating."

Ho Myung-hwan's shoulders shook at the end of the SWAT team member's words. Ho Myung-hwan was a red belt in taekwondo so he was quite proud of his skills. He also watched mixed martial arts tournaments every week and polished his skills against a pillow.

“.....Shall I try it out?”

“Good choice. Then please sign here.”

The SWAT team member extended some documents. The documents stated that he wouldn't sue if he was injured during a spar. And the title on top 'Hands-on Experience Application' seemed like it was written in a hurry. Ho Myung-hwan was quite spooked but he trusted the police 100% and signed.

“Come, please change and leave your clothes there.”

The SWAT team member accepted his application and smiled. After Ho Myung-hwan changed, the team member led him to where his opponent was waiting. A 170 centimetres tall man was visible. On the other hand, Ho Myung-hwan was 190 centimetres tall. And he also did some muscle body building in his spare time. Although his opponent was a SWAT team member, he was slightly embarrassed fighting against someone whose physique was so different to his.

“That.....shouldn't I be sparring with my weight class?”

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and asked tentatively.

“How much do you weight?”

“I don't know, a little over 90 kg so I should be in the heavyweight division.”

“That's the same as me. I'm a heavyweight too.”

The man grinned and replied. Ho Myung-hwan realised it wasn't a joke within one minute.

“Well, here I go.”

The man's body flashed. No, Ho Myung-hwan just couldn't process his movements. Then he suddenly felt an impact like a hammer was hitting his stomach and became shocked. Although he didn't know if it was a kick or a punch, it was definitely the power of a heavyweight division.

...That was the beginning of an eventful police practice.

He couldn't even remember what happened. All he could remember was his body being repeatedly hit by powerful punches or kicks. His breath was stuff from the pain. But Ho Myung-hwan never called out to stop the attacks. No, he wanted to yell out. But that man noticed whenever he was able to speak and kicked him in the stomach, making him unable to carry on.

'I-I'm going to die. This guy is going to kill me!'

Ho Myung-hwan clearly saw it at that moment. A scene where his grandmother who died in a flower garden beckoned....

"Hat!"

Ho Myung-hwan was surprised as his body automatically stood up. Then he automatically took a defensive posture thanks to his survival instincts. However, the terrible flying kick didn't come. No, the place where Ho Myung-hwan raised his body was the changing room. After being hit and fainting, he had been transferred to the changing room. Ho Myung-hwan looked stupidly around the changing room. Suddenly the door to the shower stall opened and a man emerged. Ho Myung-hwan's heart soared at the look on his face and he got goose bumps. It was the man trying to kill Ho Myung-hwan just then.

"Uh, you woke up?"

The man laughed and approached Ho Myung-hwan. It was like a terrifying envoy of the devil was approaching him. The man smiled at Ho Myung-hwan's reaction.

"Well, the training seemed to have shown an effect."

"W-what...?"

The man's face suddenly hardened and he whispered in Ho Myung-hwan's ear.

"Listen carefully. I'll only say it once. I have a copy of your ID card. If you look for the young man again then it won't end like this next time. Do you understand? If you have a complaint then you can visit the Special Criminal Measures division. But you signed the form saying we weren't to blame even if you died."

That is to say, Ho Myung-hwan made a mistake signing that document. That man.....Lee Myung-ryong tapped his shoulders and left. Ho Myung-hwan just stared blankly after Lee Myung-ryong. Blame? A complaint? They were unexpected words. The consent form didn't matter. To be honest, he was just thankful his life had been spared. After Lee Myung-ryong left, Ho Myung-hwan speedily changed clothes and left the police agency. He could only sigh with relief after riding a taxi for a few kilometres. Now that he could relax, he suddenly felt all the pain in his body.

'Ugh, my body is aching.....but what on earth? The hero of the movie? Why is the police hiding such a person? D-don't tell me I discovered something I wasn't

supposed to know? Is the young man possibly part of the FRB? CIA? Well, something like that?’

He had clearly seen too many movies.

Anyway, Ho Myung-hwan no longer dared investigate the young man’s identity. Thus, the likelihood of Global Exos discovering Hyun-woo once again became lost in a labyrinth.

Act 8: Ark’s Trading Business

“Galen ajusshi.”

“Huh? This voice....Ark, is it Ark?”

Galen instantly looked away from a pile of documents when Ark entered the Town Hall.

“Why are you here I never heard that you came back?”

“I only arrived a short time

“Anyway, welcome home. No, shouldn’t I say it’s good to have you back? You’re now a resident of Lancel. Don’t you also share a stake in the village? Oh, do you want a cup of tea?

“It’s okay. I actually wanted to ask for a favour.”

“A favour?”

“Yes, I’d like you to take in a few people.”

The place Ark thought of when drawing the magic circle was Lancel village. It was weird to see people with blue skin in middle earth, but Lancel village was a place that would unconditionally accept 50 people regardless of their race or past. After going through the dimensional gate, Ark arrived at the training centre a short distance away from the village. He had a reason for moving them to the training camp. The Baran hadn’t come over for the purpose of immigration. It was tradition for Lancel to prepare empty land for people to settle it but that didn’t apply to the Baran. Then Ark thought of the training school. Since the 300 thieves had already graduated and went to the village, it was very quiet. So Ark wanted the Baran to live

there for the moment. But there was still one problem. There were plenty of beds at the training centre. But people also had to eat in order to live. However, Ark didn't have enough food to feed 50 people. And it was impossible to shut them up in the training centre without introducing them to Lancel village so he went to find Galen.

"Can you help me?"

"Hmm.....I can't refuse since it is you asking. I also can't ignore it after hearing that their village had been attacked by monsters and they have nowhere else to go. After a good harvest the village is overflowing with food."

It was thanks to Ark finding the Sacred Soil and pouring it into the fields.

"So there is no need to worry about food. The town's commerce has also developed a lot since you've been away. The town's finances can afford to look after 50 people with no problem. I'll decide once I've met them."

Galen spoke frankly and stood up. Unlike the Netherworld where the weather was unpredictable, middle earth had normal concepts of seasons. And currently New World was in the middle of winter so the weather was quite chilly.

"The town has changed quite a lot since I've been here."

Ark said as he looked around Lancel village. He felt like the village was truly developing now. Every time he visited, it felt like it was steadily growing. After the raccoon clan joined, the buildings in particular became incredible flashy and made it look like a theme park. And apart from the NPCs, there were also a considerable number of users.

"A rumour started to spread in the area so our number of visitors has increased a lot."

"Rumour?"

Ark tilted his head to one side and Galen laughed before pointing. Despite the winter air, the Meow Elder Hassan was fast asleep on a rooftop. Users watched avidly as the tail moved or Hassan's nose twitch while snoring.

"Kyaaa, look. Over there as well."

"The tail is so cute."

Hassan.....where was the Meow's pride?

But it wasn't just Hassan. A group of users was also gathered around the sawmill where the raccoon clan was working. They pretended to do other things while gawking at the raccoons.

"Why are people gathered over there?"

"You'll understand if you keep watching."

One of the raccoons grunted and lifted a piece of timber.

Bbeong!

The raccoon's tail suddenly popped out. Although they usually transformed themselves into the guise of a person, when they were surprised or used a lot of power than their tails and short beards would pop out.

"Did you see? Did you see?"

"Kikikik! I saw it, a round tail. The short beard also briefly appeared."

The users were waiting for such a scene. When the raccoon turned his head at the sound of giggles, the users immediately turned around and pretended ignorance.

"We thought that the raccoons would go unnoticed. But foreigners sometimes visited our village and spread it around. Anyway, now our village's specialities are the Meow and raccoons. To the extent that some people visit from far away just to see them. Thanks to that, the Meow's leather and the raccoon's business are selling like hotcakes."

Galen said with a happy smile. Ark was also happier. He wanted Lancel village to develop into the intermediary point between Giran and Jackson. It meant the village's value would also increase. Ark's share in Lancel village and his real estate would then be worth more.

'Popo also had a considerable influence.'

Ark looked at Popo situation in the town centre. Popo's effect continuously raised the value and development of the town. Apart from users, rumours of Popo drew NPCs to the village. The Meow, raccoon clan, rehabilitation thieves and Popo.....all of it meant Lancel village had a deep bond with Ark. He was delighted every time he looked around Lancel village. Although he wanted to look around the town some more, he had to solve the problem of the Baran clan first.

"Oh, is that them?"

Galen asked curiously when he arrived at the training centre. Ark had explained the Baran's blue skin to him but it was strange seeing it in person.

"Yes, Bona. This ajusshi is the mayor of the village."

"Ah, hello?"

Bona greeted humbly while bowing his head. Galen nodded with a gentle smile before suddenly retreating in astonishment.

Grrrrrr.

"M-monster! Hik, over there? There too? There too? Ah Ark, what is going on?"

Galen screamed and pointed at the Hellhound next to Bona. After the trainers left, most of the monsters in the valley village returned to the wild. But among the 30 children, there were 3~4 who had the trainer ability just like Bona. Just like Bona, those children were given little monsters as pets to raise. So when they left the village, they brought the monsters by carrying it in their arms. Ark explained that to Galen whose eyes suddenly lit up.

"Hooh, hooh! They have the ability to make monsters obedient? They're blue and have such a miraculous talent? This is great."

Galen had the hobby of collecting unusual people.

"Good, very good Ark. As expected from you. Where do you find all these fascinating people? Okay, I'll take in these people. I'll take care of the residents to prevent any discomfort."

"No, like I said these people don't want to move here....."

"I know that. Of course I know. You said they came here to seek refuge from the war? It doesn't really matter. Naturally we will help. But are they truly attached to their homes? This is also a good place to live. Hahaha, I'll say it in advance but I hate people who discriminate against race the most. If they decide to settle here then they'll receive a job, welfare and even a house. How about it? Would any of you want to live here?"

.....Galen didn't pay any attention to Ark's words. He was like a businessman trying to entice the Baran clan with his promises. Then Bona approached Ark and murmured.

"Ark hyung, this ajusshi is quite scary."

"Well.....he's not a bad person. He just has a strange hobby."

Ark muttered while awkwardly smiling.

Dududung, and the quest information window popped up.

-<Find New Settlers> quest has been updated.

You have brought the children of the Baran clan from the Netherworld to Lancel village.

They've only fled the chaos of the Netherworld and don't want to migrate here. However, Galen's goal is to develop the village so he would want to accept this unusual species as a part of the village. There is a possibility that some of the Baran would want to become residents of Lancel village.

<New Settlers Found: 90% (+20%) complete>

You have found settlers with special skills.

Among the residents of the Netherworld, there are children of the Baran clan with the ability to tame monsters.

This is a very unique ability so if the children settle in Lancel village then it's 'Distinctiveness' and 'Rarity' will increase. Distinctiveness will affect the industrial value of the village while rarity will affect the value of the village. You'll have to incite them well if you want the children to become residents.

'Eh? The Baran clan can also become residents?'

Ark read the information window with shocked eyes. In fact, Ark also thought of this quest when gathering the Baran clan. Thanks to the thieves being rehabilitated, the achievement rate was 90%. There was only 10% so he needed to gather settlers somehow. However, Beseutyu shoved a nail in that idea by saying it was just a temporary evacuation.

'But isn't the valley village completely occupied by the Nakujuk? They'll have to find a new home even if they return to the Netherworld. And there are likely to be a lot of orphaned children!'

Even if he only delivered half of the 20%, this long quest was likely to finish. In addition, the town's industry and value would also increase.

"Yes Bona. This is an incredibly nice place. The residents are very kind and it is very safe. Now it is now cold because it is winter, it will be a very nice place to live in

spring. Galen ajusshi is also welcoming you. If you ever want to live here then just mention it anytime."

Ark changed his attitude and immediately tempted the Baran clan. And Galen just laughed and nodded.

"Hahaha, that's right. You recognize it as well."

"If the Baran clan feels comfortable living here then please consider it."

Please trust hyung-nim!"

"We will receive you like a family."

"You can call me uncle from now on."

At the end of his words, Ark grasped the hands of the Baran children and smiled. When the thieves graduated, some of them left but most of them stayed behind. And the thieves possessed their own past pains. They called Ark hyung-nim even though they were older than him. Well, the bandits had eventful lives similar to a drama. On the other hand, there are quite a few children orphaned in the Baran group. It might turn out surprisingly well. Of course most of the children who lost their parents would want to heal the wounds in their heart not adapt to a new environment, so it would probably take some time.

'Now that the problem of the Baran clan is solved.....'

"Bona, how long will it take to solve the password on the scroll?"

".....It should take a few days."

"Okay, please work on it. Hey, don't just stay here and follow me."

Ark stroked Bona's head before ordering Buksil to follow him.

"Dedric, you return to the Netherworld."

"Come to think of it.....isn't it possible to return here?"

Dedric who had been dozing on Ark's shoulders asked with amazement. Yes, it wasn't possible to recall his summons in the Netherworld but now they were in middle earth. There was no reason for them to stay in town. Besides Dedric had felt quite melancholy after not being able to return home for a while.

"It must be great, that guy got to go home....."

He had watched enviously as Razak died.

"Hahaha, I'm finally able to return. Master, don't call me unless it is urgent. Understood?"

Dedric quickly returned to his home in the Netherworld. Then Galen had work to do and they returned to the Town Hall.

"I have to go. I would love to stay but the village has been so busy lately I've barely had time to look after my store. Let's go and have a drink later."

So now only Buksil and Ark remained.

"That.....is it really alright?"

Buksil looked around the street with uneasy eyes.

"What?"

"I.....that.....I'm chaotic..... Coming to town....."

"I told here, here is okay."

At that time, the guards patrolling the village approached and Buksil panicked and hid behind Ark. A chaotic player was most afraid of a village's guards because they would be sent to jail if caught. However, Ark said there was no need for such worries in Lancel village. As long as he was with Ark.

"Eh? Ark hyung-nim, when did you come back?"

"A little while ago. I had some errands to run."

"Why didn't you contact us? By the way.....the pig like guy hiding behind you....."

'T-they noticed. I'm screwed!'

Buksil trembled as he saw the guards frown. But the guards then smiled and nodded.

"A freshman?"

"He's not a new student but someone who I am educating."

"You still have a lot to suffer."

The guards tapped Buksil's shoulders as they muttered.

"There will be a lot of work so hang in there. Hyung-nim won't treat you too badly."

"Huh? Huh? Huh?"

"So hyung-nim, we're going back to patrolling. If you have time then please visit the guards' lodgings."

Buksil was stunned as the guards left him and Ark. He never heard of a chaotic player being encouraged by guards.

'Looks like it was because of Ark.....why kind of human is he? The village mayor didn't even hesitate to accept 50 refugees. The villagers all recognize him.....and now the guards greeted a chaotic player?'

Ark was a very strange human. Buksil thought this as all the residents came to visit Ark. Shop owners, guards, construction workers.....not just Buksil but all the users visiting the village also looked at Ark with puzzled eyes.

'It's slightly inconvenient that there are so many users.'

Ark also felt awkward feeling all those gazes.

'I should go visit my house and see what the extension looks like.'

Ark walked towards it with a sense of expectation. Then he suddenly heard a cheer from the side. He turned around and saw that users and NPCs were gathered in the centre of town. And a familiar woman was standing on a small stage. The woman had cat ears and a tail, it was the Meow shaman Jana. The cheers subsided when Jana closed her eyes for a while. And.....Ark witnessed an unbelievable scene. Jana's body started slowly moving as the sound of an acoustic guitar was heard. Then a dim light appeared wherever the cat moved.

Nyang, nyanyang, nyanyanyang, nyang, nyang, nyang.

It was the dance of the Meow priestess! After the cat dance ended, the crowd cheered and threw a bouquet of flowers.

"The best!"

"That artful motion of ears and tail!"

"Oh, it never becomes boring even after seeing it a few times!"

"Damn, I'm impressed. I'm grateful I came to look after hearing rumours in the Sinius Principality!"

"Jana-nim, please look over here!"

'What the hell is going on?' What's with that dance and those people?'

Ark looked at the scene with astounded eyes. Jana bent down to pick up the bouquet when her nose suddenly twitched.

"Omo, this scent is.....?"

Jana grinned widely and turned her face.

"As expected, it's Ark. Hohoho, he came back nyang!"

Jana rushed towards Ark. Then like a cat seeing its owner after a long time, she wound her tail around and rubbed her body against him.

"Heung, heung, it's been a while nyang. You've become even more awesome nyang. Did you see me show just before nyang?"

"Show? That was a performance?"

"Hohoho, this body is already a celebrity nyang."

Jana twiddled her ears around and bragged. Not so long ago, some users so her dance and admired it before spreading rumours around. Thanks to that, she became a hot topic among cosplay enthusiasts and many fans came to see her show. Thanks to Galen's request, she performed several shows a day.

"But what's with that way of talking?"

"Hohoho, these words nyang?"

Jana confidently smiled and thrust out her chest.

"Elder taught me nyang. I didn't realise that men would go nuts over it nyang. It is very effective nyang. Now Jana is the most popular nyang. Nyahahaha!"

That old cat, thinking of an idea like this.....

"Now the world sees the beauty of my ears and tail nyang."

.....How is it? Are you now a little more attracted nyang? Are you going nuts nyang?"

.....Not at all, he was just a little embarrassed.

“Tell me what you think anytime nyang. Cats are quite stubborn nyang.”

Jana spoke towards Ark in a really sweet voice. Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. Why? Because the members of Jana’s fan club were shooting death glares at Ark. No, it was to the point that they almost challenged him to a duel.

“Hey!”

It was at that time. A young lady walking suddenly shrieked. The screaming woman shoved through the crowd and pushed Jana.

“You naughty cat! Why are you causing an uproar every time you wag your tail?”

“Sheesh, I smelled a noisy kid and she appeared nyang.”

“Who’s a kid? Oppa, you don’t have to be so nice to someone like her. She just messes things up!”

“What nyang? Hey you! What did you say nyang?”

“Bah! Every day being surrounded by men.... Oppa, you should’ve visited your house first when you came back to town. Or contacted me beforehand. Do you know I had to find out after hearing gossip?”

The girl Roco pulled Ark’s arm. Since the rehabilitation group stopped making hunting for the Slime’s Immortality Pill, Roco had spent most of the time in Lancel village. Then she heard that Ark had come back.

“Sheesh, what an annoying girl.”

Jana glared at Roco and then waved to Ark.

“Come visit me when you get tired of a child like that nyang. A cat doesn’t care about the past nyang.”

“Shut up you erotic cat!”

“Hahaha, what does a little girl like you know about erotica nyang?”

He truly had no room to talk between the two women. Then he felt death stares in the back of his head as Roco dragged him away.

‘If you have a girlfriend.....if you have a girlfriend.....if you have a girlfriend.....’

It was the curse message sent by Jana’s fan club.

“Here is Oppa’s new home.”

Ark’s eyes widened at the end of Roco’s words. Ark had given money to the raccoon clan to expand his house while he was in the Netherworld. Of course, there wasn’t a mail system in the Netherworld so Sid had to pay the prices. Ark asked the funds Sid owed him for the debt to pay for the expansion. But the money didn’t come from his wallet so Ark had half forgotten about it. When he saw it, his expanded house was beyond his expectations. It was like the TV show where the shabby cottage had been transformed into a stunning two-storey house. A small but vibrant garden in front of the house and even a balcony on the 2nd floor.

‘This much is definitely enough....!’

No wonder why the raccoons he met before mentioned that there wasn’t even a penny left. They didn’t just extend the house but also changed the foundations. It was definitely good to make friends with NPCs.

“Oh Ark-nim, is that your house?”

Buksil’s jaw dropped as he sent it an admiring look. Owning a house! That was a merchant’s dream. But Ark was a warrior type profession not a merchant so it was surprising that he would own a two-storey house. Roco tilted her head to one side and finally noticed Buksil.

“Eh? That person is?”

“Let’s enter while I explain.”

Ark entered his house. The good looking interior was styled very well. The raccoons had also gifted him with several pieces of furniture. Thanks to that it didn’t feel bare and empty. Ark entered the house and explained what happened in the Netherworld to Roco. Since they’ve met or talked on the phone during that time, there was no need to explain everything. However Ark felt strange while describing it to Roco. It wasn’t something he intended. But he realised that he never mentioned Lariette while talking about the Netherworld. Although he often stayed in touch with Roco, he never thought of her as a girlfriend. In addition, Lariette was something else. But strangely he didn’t feel right mentioning Lariette to Roco. A man was indeed an unknown animal.

‘Well, it’s good to avoid useless misunderstandings.’

Ark scratched his head and asked about the present situation.

“Where are the rehabilitation hyungs?”

“Last night they managed to finally get 12 Slime’s Essence. I headed to Lancel first since I heard Oppa was coming back..... They’ll be going to Jackson now.”

Jackson? Why there?”

“JusticeMan originally left Jackson to build his reputation in the Evil Silrion. However, various things happened so that he couldn’t participate in the Evil Silrion. Thus he decided to go back and explain it to Lord Jackson.

“Jackson....It’s been a long time since I was there.”

Ark became nostalgic as he thought of Jackson. Jackson was a special town for Ark. He spent most of his newbie days there. In addition, the Lord sent soldiers to help when Ark was in a crisis. He utilized Lancel as his base for various reasons, but in the game he felt like Jackson was his real home.

“Sid?”

“Sid oppa is coming to Lancel.”

Anyway, he saw most of the people he needed to see in Lancel village.

‘But what now?’

He was lost for what to do after he suddenly came back to Lancel from the Netherworld. It isn’t possible to go anywhere until Bona deciphers the scroll and hunting around the village was impossible. The monsters were around level 100 while Ark was level 282 so he wouldn’t receive any experience from hunting. In addition, the level difference was so huge that he wouldn’t be able to obtain any items. It would just build up his fatigue.

‘But I can’t stop playing.....ah, making I can make the medicines?’

Ark could use the spare time to raise his Herbal Decoction skill. Herbal Decoction required certain conditions to be fulfilled before the skill proficiency would rise to advanced. He needed to make 100 to increase it by 1. Since he had been busy hunting, he could only make it in his spare time.

“There are a huge number of herbs around Lancel village. I’ll make Buksil gather the ingredients and raise his Ingredient Foraging skill at the same time.’

Then Ark suddenly thought of something.

'Wait? Aren't there a lot of users here compared to the Netherworld? So I don't have to take the herbal medicine. Herbal Decoction makes medicines that don't have an expiry date so it can be carried for a long time. Then can't I make the herbal medicines then sell them?'

Ark's spirit felt refreshed. In fact, Ark hadn't been thinking of its marketability when making the herbal medicines. At the moment he could make effective salves, tonics and herbal teas. The salve had a low rating so it couldn't treat anything beyond the intermediate level while the tonic had to be taken for a long period of time in order to increase the stats. The herbal tea had peculiar effects but there was no draw for a user to buy it. But Ark overlooked one thing. All his thoughts about the items were based on his level. A low level user must hunt for low level monsters of course. And the abnormal conditions caused by low level monsters had a lower ranking. High-level users would require more advanced medicines to get rid of higher abnormal states. However, a beginner level state could be fatal for a low level user. Didn't Ark almost die many times when low levelled because he was affected by an abnormal condition? Eventually the Remedy became precious to low level users. That also applied to tonics and herbal teas. Taking the tonic for 30 days would increase the damage by 1, but that one point could have an enormous effect at low levels. In addition, low level users were still raising their production skills so they would be thankful for the effect of the herbal teas.

'And there are a lot of level 100 users around Lancel village. That means that Lancel village is the perfect place to sell such items. Why didn't I consider it until now?'

Herbal medicines required ingredients so it could be sold for much cheaper than alchemy potions. For low level users trying to save money, clearly the herbal medicines would be a better option. If Ark made money then wouldn't the commercial value of Lancel village increase even further?

'I thought of a good way to make money.'

However, there was one problem. It wasn't possible to sell low level herbal medicines for an expensive price. If he only engaged in business for one or two days then it wouldn't be lucrative. Compared to Giran, opening a street stall in Lancel village was a lot different. In order to make a huge profit, he would have to sell a huge variety of items in large quantities.

'So it is necessary to have a store and a part-time salesman!'

Ark looked around his extended house and smiled. He owned a two-storey house in Lancel village so there was no need to worry. And the part-time salesman Ark required..... It needed to be a merchant who mastered the relevant transactions and

accounting skills. And Ark knew of one such merchant. The hobbit Sid who was tied to him with a slave contract.

‘But Sid is my connection to the trading post in Silvana. I won’t gain any profit from tying him to a place like this. It would cause larger damage. Then the remaining merchants.....’

Ark smiled slyly and asked Buksil.

“Buksil, have you been in touch with your brothers?”

“Huh? Yes, that.....”

“Tell them to come here right now.”

“W-why?”

“I’ll introduce them to a good job.”

Ark laughed as he got up from his seat. Ark exited the house and immediately went to the town hall. In order to open a shop in the village he had to get permission from the mayor first.

“You want to set up a business?”

Galen became startled at Ark’s words.

“Yes, I think I need to open something in order to settle down properly in the village.

“Hmm, it’s not a bad idea but it won’t be easy.... Well, it’s not that hard to give permission if you really want to do it. But even though you own a house in the village, you need to possess 3% shares in the village before you can open a shop. Did you know that?”

Of course he knew. If a foreigner was able to easily own stores then there would be those sorts of shops in villages all over New World. A normal user would normally only be able to obtain 2% shares in a village. In other words, without contributions a user wouldn’t be able to open a store no matter how much money they had. Presently Ark had 2.5% of shares in Lancel village. Thanks to Galen’s promise, he could now increase it to 5% after expanding his house.

“How much to raise it by 0.1%?”

“200 gold.”

“Huh?”

Ark who had been rummaging through his bag exclaimed with shock. The price had increased by 80 gold from the 120 gold he used to buy his original shares. However, it wasn't that bad. The shares becoming so expensive meant that Lancel village was developing at a much faster pace than Ark expected. And Lancel village was still developing. Once he released the shares and sold it to users, he would definitely see a profit.

‘Okay, thanks to my bank balance I can afford to spend the money here.....’

Currently Ark carried 4,000 gold! Ark worried for a while before boldly handing Galen 3,500 gold. It would definitely become profitable so there was no reason to hesitate.

“So an extra 1.5% share and the store permit is 500 gold. Here's 3,500 gold.”

“Huh, you seemed to have received a lot of luck on this trip.”

Galen muttered at the sight of the money. Anyway, he received a certificate from Galen and a new information window showed up.

-<Relevant Investment Information Window>

Your shares in Lancel village have risen to 4%.

Once you have 3% shares then you are able to own a private store.

A player operating a store will affect the commercial business of the village. If your trade flourishes and the village thrives then more contribution points will be added and your upper limit on the shares will increase. However, if your business suffers a huge loss then it will decrease the reputation of the village. When this happens, your upper limit will go down and you might be deprived of your shop permit.

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit): 4/5%

Money was important whether in reality or in the game. Anyway now he had obtained the qualification to open a business. Ark visited the raccoons and asked them to remodel his house into a store. They easily agreed to create shelves and compartments inside the house. It cost 100 gold. After 10 minutes he only had 400 gold remaining from his original 4,000 but his heart was filled with pride.

“My store!”

Tears gathered when he saw the sign 'Ark's Comprehensive Store.' His house, his store.....people who hadn't saved their pennies in order to obtain a house or a store wouldn't be able to understand.

Sometimes in life you could recognize a someone similar with just one glance. While Ark was in the midst of preparations to open the store, Sid finally arrived in Lancel village. And the moment Sid and Buksil met, they instantly understood each other.

'That dwarf merchant, Ark-nim is also taking advantage of him.'

'That hobbit merchant, he's also been exploited by Ark.'

They didn't even have to ask. They were people who suffered underneath Ark.....

The people with experience understood each other too well.

"Did you suffer a lot?"

"No, there is....."

Sid sighed as Buksil clasped his hands and rocked on his feet. They stood facing each other before suddenly embracing. It was like meeting a friend after parting a long time ago, like they were deer licking their wounds. Although they were weak, the two merchants swore to someday plunge a dagger in that devilish person who exploited them.....

"Hey Sid. What are you doing?"

"Ark-nim!"

Sid automatically moved away when he heard Ark's voice. No matter what he thought in his head, Sid's weak body reacted first.

"Did you get what I asked you to find?"

"Of course."

Sid quickly took out the unicorn horns from his bag.

"Ayu, it was nothing. These days it is so difficult to find unicorn horns that the price has increased to 1,050 gold. But who am I? If Ark-nim is in a desert then wouldn't Sid go to collect ice for him? You asked me to buy 4 for 4,000 gold. Hehehe, now the loan price settlement.....'

Sid twisted his hands with an expectant look. Ark narrowed his eyes at Sid's attitude. He knew Sid's character. For a merchant to not show any dislike after going so far in order to receive a loan settlement was strange. But Sid had definitely bought the unicorn horns. And he already checked that the price rose to 1,050 gold on the auction site. Roco was also firmly clenching the rehabilitation group's finances. The main reason Roco was in Lancel village was to receive the items and settle the payment with Sid.

"I'll pay you right away. But the gold and items in your bag must be equal to the loan amount."

"Ah, Ark-nim knows that as well."

"Was it 4,000 gold?"

"Yep!"

Sid's eyes brightened as Ark motioned to Roco to take out her wallet. Then there was suddenly a cold smile on Ark's face. In fact, this was Ark's trap. Ark knew about the loan schemes of the Merchants guild. He had picked up the knowledge while travelling with Sid. At that time, Sid mentioned that the interest for a loan was 5%. In other words, Sid received a loan of 4,000 gold so the interest would be 200 gold. Yet Sid never even mentioned it. It meant Sid had no problem not receiving a handling charge for the 4,000 gold.

'I knew something was strange. I don't know where but he must've somehow purchased the unicorn horns for a much cheaper price. Ha, has that child grown that much? He even dared try to trick me?'

"Please show me the credit note issued by the Merchants guild first."

"Huh? W-w-w-why?"

Sid panicked and stuttered.

"You might not know, but haven't I decided to operate a store? But I can't operate it using a guessing system. I have to check it and record it well after each transaction. If you buy things with a credit note then how will I know you haven't taken anything? I want to confirm that you borrowed 4,000 gold."

"T-t-t-that....."

".....Do you want to die?"

Ark murmured in a low voice before Sid tearfully extended his credit not. It was recorded that he had spent 3,404 gold in an auction in Giran. He had bought it for 851 gold instead of the 1,000 gold he told Ark. He stared at it for a long time as the silence ticked away. Well, his profession was a merchant. Doing everything possible to receive a profit was worthy of praise. He didn't want trouble before the opening of his business so Ark pretended to tolerate it.

"You bought it cheaper than I thought. Well done. Here's 3,404 gold."

Sid had swelled up with anticipation and released it with a sigh as he accepted the money. Then he had a thought and quickly calculated the interest.

"Ah Ark-nim, the loan interest....."

"What?"

Ark's face twisted as he glared at him. He'll say it again but Sid trying to gain profit was worth praising. But only if Ark wasn't his opponent.

"What the? Why were you silent when I offered you 4,000 gold before? However now you're mentioning it? Are you trying to scam me? Huh? Do I look like I'm easy to trick? If you keep on mentioning it then I won't let the problem go. Do you want me to become serious?"

".....Of course I will have to take care of it. Hahaha, of course."

"Ah, is that what you meant? Hahaha, then I'm thankful."

Ark laughed and tapped Sid's shoulder. Of course, they payment Ark received from Roco included interest so it was 4,200 gold. He paid Sid 3,404 gold while the remaining 796 gold obviously went into Ark's stomach. He only had 400 gold left after all the preparations for his store so he needed this gold. And Sid was forced to increase his debt by 200 in order to pay off the interest. Fortunately Isyuram forcefully gave Sid 100 gold but there was the 40 gold handling fee for the auction so '200-100+40=140.' So 140 gold still remained intact. He had crudely tried to use a shrew plan but it ended up backfiring on him. Isyuram to Sid, Sid to Ark.....in the end the pinnacle of the food chain was Ark.

'Hah, it's not my problem.

Buksil sighed and watched the gloomy Sid walk around the corner. He didn't know what happened but he could tell that Sid had been struck by Ark. It was at that time. He heard some marvellous voices from behind him.

“Hyung-nim!”

“Oh, Sapjil! Ulmeok!”

Buksil turned around with a wide grin and shouted. Buksil contacted Sapjil and Ulmeok and now he greeted them with tears. It was a poignant moment meeting for the first time after separating in the Netherworld. Buksil’s face clearly showed signs of suffering and he was wearing shabby attire.

“Ack, how has that guy been treating you?”

“Hyung-nim, you must have suffered a lot.”

The three little pig brothers embraced each other with tears streaming down their faces. Then Sapjil suddenly looked at Buksil. His eyes blinked a few times before he winced and retreated.

“Ah, Hyung-nim.....this feeling.....c-chaotic.....”

“Oh, you saw it? I’ll tell you what happened.”

Buksil sighed and tried to explain. However Ulmeok just flinched and retreated from him.

“No, I’ll tell you the circumstances. It was actually revenge.....Sapjil?”

Sasasasak.

“Ulmeok?”

Sasasasak.

Whenever Buksil approached, Sapjil and Ulmeok immediately avoided him.

“Hyung-nim, I’m really sorry.” But no matter how it happened, you’re still chaotic.”

“Sob. Hyung-nim, you’ve become a bad guy in the meantime.”

“You, even you guys...!”

Buksil had believed in his two brothers and received a large shock from their attitude.

"Ya, why are you lingering over there? A chaotic player can't be hanging around when my store is opening soon. Don't wander around and get caught by a hunter. So you should shut yourself up somewhere until it is time to go to the Netherworld."

"Even Ark-nim is treating me like this?"

In the end Buksil was crushed as well and ended up standing gloomily next to Sid. Sid and Buksil, these two merchants would continue to receive misfortune thanks to Ark.

Anyway all the necessary preparations were finished. The interior had been changed and he even recruited a merchant as a salesman. Of course the two merchants didn't want to be salesmen in a small mountain village's store. But Ark managed to convince Sapjil and Ulmeok to stay until Buksil's chaotic status was removed. And the next day, 'Ark's Comprehensive Store' opened its doors.

"Now, I'm going to start raking in the money starting from today!"

Ark exclaimed after putting something up at the entrance. It was the 'One thousand visitors.' It was an item that allowed stores to receive an extra 3% value on their goods. Originally he thought to give it to Sid but now he used it directly for his own gain!

The grand opening of 'Ark's Comprehensive Store' in Lancel village!

It sells all items ranging from japtjem to magic items!

Also selling unusual but inexpensive items that don't exist in middle earth!

Feel the efficiency of the herbal medicines only sold at Ark's Comprehensive Store!

Recommended for those who want to become a master at foraging! Herbal Tea: 1~3 silver

An innovation price for a remedy to treat abnormal states! Salve: 10~15 silver

Eating this food will make you become stronger! Tonic (30 days): 2~5 gold

Limited sale of 30 items to commemorate the opening of the store! Nadingka's fruit: 2 silver

Ark started his business with the herbal medicines as his main product. But he didn't get an explosive response from the low-level users like he expected. The biggest problem was that Lancel village was much larger than in the past. The larger scale of the village meant there were 3 more general stores. In total there were 12 shops. And all the stores were concentrated at the entrance or in the centre of the village. On the other hand, Ark's store was in a residential area. There was no large population flow there so it was impossible to do business.

'What, this is? At this rate will I lost my investment?'

Ark watched the empty store for two days with impatience. There were quality items. The salves had the same potency as potions while being 50% cheaper while the tonic would be helpful in improving the stats of level 100 users. But what did it matter if the products were excellent? How could users try it if they didn't even know about it?

'As expected, I have to advertise the business. An idol is the best for effective advertising.'

So Ark visited the Meow section and requested Jana's help. With the usual Ark adoration Jana gladly accepted.

"Hello nyang. Everybody, do you know my wonderful boyfriend Ark? Nyang nyang, in fact he opened a store in the residential business. He has really good items to sell so please use it frequently in the future nyang."

Jana promoted the store to her fan club after she danced.

.....It had an effect.

-That bastard, get lost.

-I hope all your items are destroyed!

Curses and profanities were immediately written on the walls of Ark's Comprehensive Store. Ark decided to significantly modify his advertising strategy.

'Unbelievable. How the hell can I gather people.....?'

Ark frantically thought of new marketing strategies.

'Wait? Isn't there an easy way to get people to buy good items? Raising the price for low level users would be a burden so shouldn't I go the opposite way? I'll hide the store instead of advertising it.'

Ark instantly implemented his plan. Ark's influence on the NPCs of Lancel village was enormous. So he couldn't not take advantage of it. Ark put the sign and product list away and met with the Meow, the raccoons and the reformed thieves as he roamed the village. Then a strange rumour started to spread through Lancel village behind him.

"Hey, did you hear the rumour?"

"Yes I heard it. The one about the huge effects?"

"I've received an introduction so let's go check it out."

The Meow, raccoons and thieves gathered in groups of 2 or 3 and whispered together. Whenever the users approached them, they would panic and hurriedly shut their mouths. Users started to show curiosity once rumours of their strange actions spread. In RPG games, sometimes players would find a secret shop. Those stores weren't available everywhere and sold unusual goods. All the users were game enthusiasts so they immediately thought of a secret store when they saw the NPCs reactions. The users would sometimes raise their intimacy with the NPCs to obtain the information, eavesdrop or even threatening the NPCs. And shortly after.....

"Hello!"

"What product are you looking for?"

Ark welcomed his first guest. The warrior glanced around at the items on display. Leather, bone etc.....all the japtrem he gathered from the Netherworld was on display. However, the warrior wasn't disappointed. He received information from a NPC that everything was disguised.

"Hmm hmm, I heard there were rare items only shown to people introduced here."

"Huh? Uh, where did you hear such talk.....?"

Ark's tense expression completely convinced the warrior.

"A person I know introduced me. So can you show me?"

"But it's a secret so if can't just show it to anyone....."

"That won't be a problem. I won't spread any rumours so just show me a little bit."

"Hah, it can't be helped. I understand. I'll show you as long as you don't go anywhere else to buy it."

"Yes yes, I understand."

"Then first take a look at this note. It lists the inventory of items only sold to 'chosen' people. Don't say the names and just secretly write what you want and the quantity."

When Ark spoke secretly, the warrior pretended ignorance like a hero in a spy movie and read the piece of paper. It had in depth information about the items and how to use them. If he were given this paper on the streets, the warrior probably would've thrown it away without looking at it. However, the warrior was tempted by the 'secret' and read the piece of paper several times.

"I didn't know there were such items. Give me 10 of this and this."

"Oh, but those items don't have that much left in stock....."

"I'll pay one silver more."

Ark sighed and pretended to fret so the warrior became impatient and promised even more money.

'Huhuhu, it is a success!'

Ark laughed as he watched the warrior carry out the goods he received. The 'secret' was the core of his marketing campaign. And being the first to know the secret was the original charm. But after a while.....anyone could know the secret. At first they would probably feel a sense of superiority. However, they won't be able to feel that sense of superiority if they didn't tell anyone. The people who looked for Ark's Comprehensive Store were the same. They all nodded when Ark asked them to keep it a secret. But soon users would go to their friends and say 'that guy sold this to me.' And the surprised friends would confirm the effect of the items while the original buyer's face would say 'Huhuhu, how about it? I know this secret shop.' It was a domineering expression on his face.

The marketing was a great success! Although everyone knew about it, the users thought they were the only ones to know and secretly gathered in Ark's shop. And every time they would buy 10 or 20 after Ark mentioned that the items were almost sold out. Thanks to that the herbal medicines suddenly ran out.

'Wow, it's not a joke? All these ingredients supplied by Buksil have run out?'

The ingredients supply couldn't keep up with the sales so Ark visited the Baran at the training centre. The Baran gathered sap so most of them had the foraging skill. Ark shared japtem with them since they didn't have the concept of money and the Baran started gathering ingredients from around Lancel village. A new rumour

started to spread that NPCs with blue skin similar to smurfs were living in Lancel village.....

Anyway, thanks to that Ark's 'secret' store became famous.

'Now my store is on track. But it's not there yet. Including the house, I invested approximately 4,000 gold into this business. I have to maintain this state for several months in order to make a profit. Well, Lancel village now has a mailbox so I can easily supply the goods.....'

Since the business became so good, Ark suddenly faced new challenges.

'I can't be preoccupied with the sales. I also have to connect with Sid's trading post in Silvana and engage in large transactions. But I have to rely on Sapjil and Ulmeok. Leaving the shop to them is a bit.....'

Yes, Ark wasn't satisfied with it just being the secret store in Lancel village. He had the intention of connecting with the trading post in Silvana when he created the store. Connecting to Silvana was the first step in establishing a trade route between Silvana and Lancel which was Ark's grand dream. However, Ark couldn't become a merchant and stay at the store in Lancel village. But he was worried about entrusting it to Sapjil and Ulmeok.

'A trustworthy person.....'

Then Ark suddenly heard Roco's voice in his ears.

"Kids, what are you doing now?"

"Isn't the turnover rate for that one the best? Pile it up on the outside."

"Look at this dirt. Is that what you consider cleaning? The attitude is a problem you should get rid of."

These days, it was routine for Roco to stay in the store and nag Sapjil and Ulmeok whenever she connected. Ark snapped his fingers as he stared at Roco.

'That's right, why didn't I think of that?'

She was too close so I didn't notice. Roco had experience after handling the finances of the rehabilitation group and 300 thieves. Although she wasn't as strong in profit or loss as them, Roco had a firm controlling grasp on Sid, Sapjil and Ulmeok. Additionally, he could always take to Roco on the phone and get a grasp on

the situation in the store and provide necessary instructions. Indeed, she was the best choice for a store manager!

“Roco, would you like to become the store manager?”

“Store manager?”

“Yes, there will be numerous times when I'll have to leave and I can only entrust it to you.”

“I'll do it. I accept!”

Roco shouted when Ark finished talking.

“The pay is.....”

“You don't have to worry.

Oppa's money is my money.....’

Roco laughed as she twisted her body. A fantasy was already playing in Roco's head.

“Oppa, I've earned all this gold!”

“Oh, indeed you're the only one I can trust. My burning love, my darling!”

“Hohoho, let's build a house of gold on that blue meadow.”

“Hahaha, let's eat as much cotton candy as we want!”

‘Hehehe.’

Roco drooled while imagining things. Sapjil and Ulmeok winced and retreated.

“W-what's with that woman? Why is she drooling while laughing?”

“Clearly her mind has gone away. Hyung-nim, we have to work for her?”

“A devilish owner, crazy manager.....why do we always.....”

“Sob, Hyung-nim I'm scared.”

Sapjil and Ulmeok cried as they embraced each other and trembled with fear. Anyway, Roco was appointed as the general manager for Ark's Comprehensive Store.

Act 9: Truth of the World Trees

“A remarkable event took place in Selebrid a few days ago!”

He heard an excited voice as soon as he turned on the TV. It was the voice of the female reporter in charge of the game scoops. It was the weekly corner that dealt with events in New World. This week the corner was on the monsters attacking Selebrid. The male reporter was an actual gamer and described it with a serious expression.

“As everybody knows, Selebrid is the capital city of the Schudenberg Kingdom where most users started. A large number of guards are concentrated around the palace, in the city and even in the suburbs. As a comparison, not even a dragon would be able to break into Selebrid.”

“But didn’t an event which tore apart common sense occur?”

“That’s right. Surprisingly dozens of monsters managed to break into Selebrid.”

“Let’s see the footage.”

Soon after the screen changed and the Selebrid square appeared. There were merchants leisurely strolling the streets, lovers dating in front of the fountain, people enjoying a nap on the benches....it was indeed a peaceful scene. But at that moment, an area in the square distorted and a gate appeared. And dozens of monsters with terrifying appearances exited.

“Ugh, w-where is this?”

“There are foreigners. So many foreigners....!”

“All of them are enemies. Kill!”

The monsters looked around and began to wildly attack the users. Fortunately, the emergency signal went off and the guards were able to handle the mobs with no problems. However it left a deep wound in Selebrid who prided themselves on not allowing monsters to invade. The screen returned to the studio.

“A truly shocking scene. What is going on?”

“It’s difficult to say at the moment. The senior magicians immediately mobilized after the incident to investigate the gate but no official announcement has been made. I can only guess that the gate the monsters came through is connected to another dimension.”

The female reporter asked with a surprised expression.

"A different dimension? Other dimensions exist in New World?"

"Of course. Although it hasn't be officially announced by the publishers, typically users know that there are several dimensions including middle earth."

"That's right. That must be why so many users are interested in this incident."

"Yes, so far there have only been rumours but the different dimensions were confirmed for the first time. Opinions are also mixed on whether this might cause another Event Quest like the one in Jackson. But the production company Global Exos....."

Hyun-woo never expected that it would appear on TV. Hyun-woo was the main cause for the monsters attacking Selebrid. While facing Duke in the woods near the valley village, he had created the dimensional gate using the Dimensional Movement Powder to get rid of the Nakujuk. Yes, that exit for that gate was Selebrid. He had gathered the Nakujuk and the pushed them through the gate. He had forgotten about it until it suddenly appeared on TV. Ark smiled wryly and sat in front of his computer. He wanted to confirm the situation in the auction.

-The auction is complete. Death Engraved Stick: 11,100,000 won.

-The auction is in progress. Magaro's Deluxe Alchemy Tools: Currently 9,000,000 won.....

He received the best profit from the Netherworld items. As expected, they sold at exorbitant prices. No, to be honest he hadn't expected that much for the 'Death Engraved Stick.' He put it on the auction for 5 million won but the price went up to 10 million won in 1 day. The auction climbed so quickly that he even started to expect 20,000,000 won. But afterwards it only rose by 100,000 won and eventually it ended up being sold for 11,100,000 won.

"There aren't that many users raising Necromancers."

However selling 1 item for 11,100,000 won was clearly a jackpot. On the other hand, Magaro's Deluxe Alchemy Tools wasn't rising by a huge amount but it was rising steadily. There were still three days before the auction finished so he might end up receiving even more than the Death Engraved Stick. He expected it to sell at a higher price. Unlike the Necromancer, there were plenty of users raising alchemy.

"I might receive 20,000,000 won even with the handling fee."

Hyun-woo currently had 12,000,000 won in his bank account. He spent around 6,000,000 won every month so he had saved quite a lot. If he added this income then he would have 32,000,000 won. But for Hyun-woo it was strange to have money. He felt more uneasy. Money was a truly mysterious fellow. Whenever he gathered a little bit it always seemed like he needed more. Hyun-woo also felt the same. He started having many thoughts once he gathered some money.

'If Mother becomes a lot better in the future then she might be released from hospital. When the time comes I'll have to move to a more sanitary house for her.... And I should really put aside money for a game unit in case the entrance examination suddenly ends.'

But when he compared it to his past, they seemed like happy worries.

"Anyway, my income is unstable so I can't spend money recklessly. And I need to make more profit after thinking about my plans for the future. In addition, I spent 3,500 gold this time to create a store. Most of my spending is in investments. For the meantime I should tighten my belt."

Hyun-woo was moving the mouse when he suddenly stopped. He saw an unexpected message.

-You have received an instant purchase request.

Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred: 4,000,000 won.

"Instant purchase? For 4,000,000 won?"

Hyun-woo's mouth widened. He had obtained the 'Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred' from Kaljapeu. It was a magic item so Ark didn't have high expectations for it. Of course, it had a special option but the defense wasn't that great compared to the level required to wear the item. In addition, the 'hate' stat was necessary or else the special option wouldn't be available.

'It should only get around 2,000,000 won.'

When he checked yesterday, the bid was only 1,800,000 won. Now he suddenly received an instant purchase request for 4,000,000 won.

"What kind of person is this?"

The purchase price was so outrageous that Hyun-woo looked at the requestor's ID.

"Eh? Huh? T-this guy.....!"

The ID for the auction site was 'Charming Man!' It was an ID that he had seen before. No, to be precise Ark knew the person with this ID. It was the person who bought the 'Sacred Earth Shield' in the past. And that shield was the cause of Hyun-woo's crisis in Salrin's Towers. Yes, 'Charming Man' was the ID for Alan. In fact, Hyun-woo suffered some embarrassment just before entering the Netherworld. Hyun-woo had registered as a bounty hunter before going off to deal with Alan. And he stopped by Selebrid before going to the Netherworld to collect the 500 gold bounty.

However, he heard some unbelievable words from the Supreme Court judge. When the target died because of a bounty hunter they would be automatically trapped in jail. The NPCs would check and then pay a reward. But the judge said that Alan never appeared in jail. Thanks to that Hyun-woo still hadn't received the reward of 500 gold.

'What's going on? I confirmed that Alan died.....'

It was still an unanswered mystery. After that he hadn't heard any news about Alan. When the guy suddenly disappeared, Hyun-woo thought that Alan had given up on the game. He probably deleted his character so that the reward couldn't be received. But now he suddenly appeared on the auction site and wanted to purchase an item. New World didn't allow two characters so it was clearly Alan. But did it make sense that he raised his level so much that he could now buy a level 200 item?

'But that's not the only strange thing. Alan has a lot of money. He had so much that some of it is probably rotting. So why would he want to buy my items? Are there also a lot of rare gauntlets on the auction site? He could probably buy better gauntlets for 4 million won. So why....?'

He wouldn't have been worried about it if the person wasn't Alan. And Hyun-woo was soon able to guess the reason.

'I'm sure that Alan needs these particular gauntlets. I don't know exactly why but it must be important since he doubled the price on the instant purchase request. If that's the case....'

A smile spread on Hyun-woo's mouth. His opponent was someone with a lot of money. And this was a necessary item for him. Then wasn't there a way he could use this? Hyun-woo immediately rejected the purchase request and called the rehabilitation members.

"Are hyung-nims using their IDs on the auction site?"

"Uh, no. Why?"

“What will you do?”

“Make some money.”

Hyun-woo laughed as he replied. Normally the auction site directly connected to the account so they never informed others of their ID. However, the rehabilitation members didn't ask any questions and just gave their IDs and passwords. Thus Hyun-woo got his hands on 10 IDs and immediately started to manipulate the market price.

“The remaining auction period is 4 days. How far will you go?”

Hyun-woo used Jjak-tung's ID to bid 4,010,000 won. Sure enough, 'Charming Man' bid 4,500,000 won after 1 hour. Then Hyun-woo connected to Bul-kkun's ID after 1 hour and bid 4,510,000 won. So they played ping pong for 8 hours until the price for the gauntlets increased from 2 million won to 6 million won.

‘Huhuhu, will you increase it even more? Keep on increasing. If you give up because of this amount of money than your pride will be injured. I'll use this opportunity to receive my bounty.’

Hyun-woo smirked as he bid 6,010,000 won. However, another bid did not come even after a long period of time. Hyun-woo suddenly became afraid.

‘What, what the? Surely this guy.....did he just give up?’

It was a chance to sell the gauntlets for 6 million won instead of 2 million won. In fact, Hyun-woo would've been satisfied with 6 million won. But he had to be greedy and bid one more time to increase it over 6 million won.

‘Please.....please just bid one more time.....’

Hyun-woo prayed as he glared at the monitor. If Alan gave up this bid then Hyun-woo would have to pay the 6 million won from his own account. Of course, that money would just return to Hyun-woo but he would still need to pay the 7% handling fee. 420,000 won would just fly away. Then he would have to sell the gauntlets and pay the fee again. It would end up harming Hyun-woo instead of Alan. However, a new bid did not come the next morning.

‘Dammit, I'm screwed!’

Hyun-woo sighed and was about to exit the auction site.

-You have received an instant purchase request.

Plated Gauntlets of Corrupted Hatred: 8,000,000 won.

“8....8 million won!”

Hyun-woo was shocked and saw that it was indeed Alan. He struggled for a while before deciding to accept. This was probably Alan’s limit. He didn’t know why Alan wanted the gauntlets so much but he couldn’t pass up the opportunity when the market price had increased by 4 times. Hyun-woo reached out and pressed the accept button.

“Huhuhu, Alan you were an easy mark!”

Although it wasn’t New World, once again Hyun-woo had won over Alan. After a while, Hyun-woo confirmed the transaction and stared warmly at his unit before entering it. Hyun-woo heard the sound of the unit connecting to his brain. Then the land of New World which promised profit and trouble appeared.

--

“Hmm.....”

Ark was lost in thought as he stared down at the scroll. After logging into the store, Roco told Ark that Bona was looking for him. The deciphering of the scroll had been completed.

“I didn’t know what information Ark hyung is looking for so I deciphered all the scrolls. You can read the separate translation I created.”

The ten scrolls Beseutyu designated mentioned the epic tale of the birth of the Netherworld. After reading it, Ark managed to obtain the desired information. There were a lot of expressions and abstract meanings due to the nature of the legend but he summed it all simply.

Surprisingly, hundreds of years ago the Netherworld was originally a part of middle earth. However, suddenly a huge calamity which split the sky and earth occurred. Numerous species and land was swallowed by the calamity and disappeared. Among them was the Netherworld. A huge storm struck the Netherworld after its world tree disappeared. The Netherworld was caught in the storm and sunk into the dimension lower than middle earth. And the air currents from that storm formed the sky in the Netherworld. The spinning sky Ark saw in the Netherworld was actually because of the dimensional storm. Also the strange

weather and terrain in the Netherworld was because of the influence of the storm on that dimension.

After all, not all of the earth that moved to the dimension was in an intact state at the time. Sometimes a small pebble or even a giant mountain would become trapped after the dimension distorted or it would be left in a non-existent form. This was the 'Underground' that Beseutyu mentioned.

Unfortunately, that was everything written on the scroll. It didn't state how Ark could return the Underground to its original form. But the decrypted contents of the scroll did give him an important clue.

'The Netherworld's world tree!

The scrolls recorded that the world tree was destroyed in the storm before the Netherworld disappeared. So wasn't the core of all these events the world tree? And if it was regarding the world tree then Ark had a source to find out information from.

"I didn't expect to use it like this."

Ark took out the 'Sacred Branch' from his bag. The 'Sacred Branch' had come from Popo's trunk. It had various effects but the one Ark wanted right now was to communicate with Yggdrasil.

"But how do I use communication with this thing?"

Ark turned the branch around but as expected he didn't see a dial or call button. He thought for a moment before putting the branch to his forehead and focusing his mind. He was visualizing Yggdrasil when the space in front of his eyes suddenly turned white.

"Ugh, w-where is this?"

Ark scratched his head and looked around. Surprisingly Ark was in an entirely different place. He had been at the training centre in the woods and now he was in a wide open place where the horizon couldn't be seen. But that wasn't what caused Ark's surprise. In the far distance, many gold coins were stacked up like a huge mountain. It was literally a field of money. He couldn't afford to wonder where he was right now.

"T-this is a windfall!"

Ark plunged wildly into the money field. And he collected the gold coins like crazy. However, the gold coins turned into sand and dripped through his fingers when he

touched them. Ark was confused and tried it a few more times but the results were the same.

“What the? A prank?”

Ark let out an impressive stream of curses. Then a dim light appeared and revealed an old man.

-We've finally met after a long time Deliverer.

“Eh? Yggdrasil!”

Ark stood up and approached Yggdrasil.

“Where on earth is this?”

-Hahaha, this must be your first time here. This is your spirit world. All the scenery here is what your mind imagined. Even so.....your spirit world.....seems.....really....marvellous.

“Please don't tease me.”

-I'm not teasing! This is really the most amazing spirit world I've been to.

Yggdrasil said with a laugh. Even though it was a game, but a field of money? It seemed somewhat superficial. Ark sighed with a melancholy expression before Yggdrasil asked.

-By the way did you call me for something?

“Oh, I contacted you because I have a question.”

Ark finally remembered his original purpose.

-Question?

“Yes, it is about the Netherworld's world tree.”

-What? The Netherworld's world tree? Have you been to the Netherworld?

Yggdrasil spoke in a frenzied voice and approached Ark. Ark was bewildered by the violent reaction and nodded.

“Huh? Yes..... There were various circumstances and I ended up going to the Netherworld. But I ran into some trouble while travelling through the Netherworld. A necessary item I need is stuck in a dimensional gap called the Underground. It

happened in recent years but it seemed like the cause was the original phenomenon which destroyed the Netherworld."

Ark roughly read the contents of the scrolls.

-I see what you mean. But half of the contents of those scrolls are wrong. This explanation might be long but you need to know it.

Yggdrasil nodded before opening his mouth.

-I've said this once before but the world trees is the existence which maintains the balance. It does nothing but it also does everything. Indeed, the world trees have a large number of roles. And originally there existed 4 world trees. These four trees secured the North, South, East and West respectively.

Yggdrasil suddenly started explaining the history of New World. Anyway according to Yggdrasil, New World used to consist of a much larger continent than now. However, a great change took place on that continent hundreds of years ago. It was thanks to the hand of the Dark Lord.....

At that time, the Dark Lord plunged the world into darkness before being defeated by the 7 heroes. However, the Dark Lord had one final weapon. He used a dark spell to drain the lives of all beings that belonged to the darkness in order to drive the world to ruin. It was the catastrophe written on the scrolls.

-It was horrible. Parts of the world literally vanished. But if there was darkness then there was always light to oppose it. The 7 heroes fought numerous battles before finding an ancient scroll filled with magic.

The 7 heroes were able to use the magic of the world trees to defeat the dark magic. The world trees which maintained balance poured all of their magic into the spell. But even such power couldn't fully stop the dark spell.

-It was possible to defend most of the earth and many lives. But the darkness at the edges of the world magic wasn't able to be stopped. A powerful curse swept through the ground and burned countless lives. The world trees used all their strength remaining to prevent it. It was power necessary to maintain the balance of the world.

Yggdrasil then looked at the horizon with a faraway look and sighed.

-Thankfully the life of the land was able to be maintained but all the world trees except for me lost their strength and withered up. At this point, the land they presided over wasn't fastened to the world and was unable to withstand the storm. Among them is the world tree Yuzuria,

who maintained the land Seutandal.....which is the Netherworld you spoke of. This world is the lost continent.

Ark remembered seeing in the information window that popped up when he first entered the Netherworld. The 'Lost World=Seutandal' was clearly written on the Netherworld's information window. It meant that it was lost from middle earth. Although the history lesson on the Netherworld was interesting, it didn't contain the information he wanted to know.

"Then reverting the Underground back to the original dimension....."

-The only way to revert the Underground back is to stabilize the Netherworld. And consequently there is only one possible method.

"What is it?"

-The world tree of the Netherworld that I mentioned earlier....Yuzuria is not completely lifeless. If Yuzuria's life hadn't been depleted then the Netherworld would've never sunken to the bottom dimension. But it cannot regain its strength while stuck in the dimensional gap. Then the answer is simple. If you revive Yuzuria then the Netherworld will rise back to its original dimension and stabilize.

"The world tree can be revived?"

-That's right. The key is already in your hands. The 'Sacred Branch.' It is a treasure which can restore the vitality of the world trees. I believe that Yuzuria will have a defined body that is deeply hidden somewhere. If you return to the Netherworld and restore Yuzuria's power then everything will go back to its original form.

Yggdrasil grabbed Ark's hands and said.

-Deliverer, I ask you. Yuzuria defended this world with his whole body. He has the right to exist and I firmly believe that you can help him.

"Hah, you're saying that to someone whose spirit world is like this?"

Ark was a narrow-minded guy. Although he said it in a sarcastic voice, Yggdrasil just laughed and pointed to the sky.

-I have such expectations because of this spirit world.

"What....huk!"

Ark raised his head to follow Yggdrasil's fingers and let out a small scream.

Ark's spirit world before was quite shallow. But now the gold coins were floating into the sky to form a sun which emitted a bright light. No, he thought it was the sun but when he looked closer he saw that it was a familiar presence. In the superficial spirit world of Ark, the bright light which did not allow darkness to exist was...

"M-mother!"

-.....I've never seen such a bright light in someone's spirit world.....

"I accept. I'll do it! Even if I have to risk my life!"

Ark blushed and the words tumbled out of his mouth as he looked at Yggdrasil. Dududung, the quest information window popped up.

The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree

You have listened as Yggdrasil conveyed a hidden history to you.

Finding the balance is the mission of all players in New World. The first step is to revive the Netherworld's world tree, Yuzuria. If successful then the lost world of Seutandal will re-join middle earth like before.

<Difficulty level: ★ ★ ★ ★>

'A quest? And it is a special difficulty one!'

That meant it was a Lore quest! A Lore quest dealt with historical events that could have an impact on the entirety of New World. As he previously saw, it was extremely difficult and there wasn't any compensation for it except for the stars. It seemed fruitless. Besides, this was 4 stars so wouldn't it be way more difficult than in the past?

'What a misleading description....what will collecting stars give me? Well, even without this quest I would still need to revive Yuzuria.....'

Ark sighed and exited the spirit world. He knew the method to complete the quest. But there was a serious problem when he thought about it. The Underground would disappear when he resurrected Yuzuria. But at the same time the Netherworld would move to middle earth. That was the problem. So far, Ark had monopolized the Netherworld but once it moved to middle earth then users would flock to it like a cloud. However, that was a problem for the future.

What if the Hermes Alliance and the Nakujuk conquered the Netherworld while Ark was completing the quest?

‘Currently the Nakujuk and Baran are preparing for war in the Netherworld. It is most likely that the Hermes Alliance and Nakujuk would occupy the southern region if they conquered the Netherworld. If the Netherworld moves to middle earth.....’

The Hermes Alliance would gain benefits that he couldn’t even imagine. Without the Baran there was no hope of stopping the Nakujuk’s conquest. But like Beseutyu said, the odds weren’t in their favour even if the Baran joined forces and fought against the Nakujuk. Especially if the Hermes Alliance started to support them more actively. He couldn’t just sit and watch as the Hermes Alliance occupied the Netherworld. In fact, he had no time to complete the quest.

“But there’s nothing I can do.”

Of course Ark had his own forces. While fighting in Silvana, his attack group Dark Eden consisted of the rehabilitation group, the Meow, the raccoons, the reformed thieves and the soldiers from Jackson. Even if he called them again, he would only be able to gather dozens at most. On the other hand, this wasn’t a war between guilds or a siege. It was a race war between the Baran and Nakujuk. Dozens of reinforcements wouldn’t be enough. They wouldn’t be a match for the Nakujuk and Hermes Alliance. He needed forces equivalent to a species in order to solve this problem.

‘If I can’t gather enough forces to defeat the Nakujuk then it will be a failure. Anyway, I can’t allow the Nakujuk and Hermes Alliance to take over the Netherworld. In other words, I need to either stop the Nakujuk’s offensive or maintain it in its previous state. But the forces needed.....’

Ark slowly sighed before a thought came to him.

‘There is! There is something that could have enough power to change the battle situation in the Netherworld!’

“Shambala!”

[End of Book 11]